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**STUDIES IN KEATS  
NEW AND OLD**





**S T U D I E S I N K E A T S  
N E W A N D O L D ,**

**by**

**John Middleton Murry**

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## PREFATORY NOTE

MOST of these essays on Keats were designed to fill gaps, of which I have since become sensible, in my previous book, *Keats and Shakespeare*. But each of them has its own independent justification, and I hope they will prove to be of some interest and value to the growing number of those who find sustenance in the rich and heroic nature of Keats.

I desire to express my grateful thanks to Miss Roberta Cornelius, to whom I owe my knowledge of the reviews of Keats' 1817 volume discussed in the first essay; to Mr. Frederick Page, for his kindness in reading the essays in manuscript and giving me the benefit of his criticism; and to the Editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, from which the study *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* is reprinted.

YATELEY, 6 January 1930.

## NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

TO this new edition have been added three additional essays—Nos. VII, VIII, and IX—an addition so substantial that the title of the book has had to be changed to *Studies in Keats, New and Old*.

LARLING, November, 1938.



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# I

## AN ELEGANT, PURE, AND AERIAL MIND GEORGE FELTON MATHEW

IN the *European Magazine*, for October 1816, appeared the following copy of verses:

### TO A POETICAL FRIEND

O Thou who delightest in fanciful song,  
And tellest strange tales of the elf and the fay;  
Of giants tyrannic, whose talismans strong  
Have power to charm gentle damsels astray;  
Of courteous knights-errant, and high-mettled steeds;  
Of forests enchanted, and marvellous streams:—  
Of bridges, and castles, and desperate deeds;  
And all the bright fictions of fanciful dreams:—  
Of captures, and rescues, and wonderful loves;  
Of blisses abounding in dark leafy bowers;—  
Of murmuring music in shadowy groves,  
And beauty reclined on her pillow of flowers:—  
O where did thine infancy open its eyes?  
And who was the nurse that attended thy spring?  
For sure thou'rt exotic to these frigid skies,  
So splendid the song that thou lovest to sing.  
Perhaps thou hast traversed the glorious East;  
And like the warm breath of its sun, and its gales,  
That wander 'mid gardens of flowers to feast,  
Are tintured with every rich sweet that prevails?  
O no!—for a Shakspeare—a Milton are ours!  
And who e'er sung sweeter, or stronger, than they?  
As thine is, I ween was the spring of *their* powers;  
Like theirs, is the cast of thine earlier lay.  
It is not the climate, or scenery round,  
It was not the nurse that attended thy youth;  
That gave thee those blisses which richly abound  
In magical numbers to charm, and to soothe.



## AN ELEGANT, PURE, AND AERIAL MIND:

O no!—'tis the Queen of those regions of air—  
 The gay fields of Fancy—thy spirit has blest;  
 She cherish'd thy childhood with fostering care,  
 And nurtur'd her boy with the milk of her breast.

She tended thee ere thou couldst wander alone,  
 And cheer'd thy wild walks amidst terror and dread;—  
 She sung thee to sleep with a song of her own,  
 And laid thy young limbs on her flowery bed.

She gave thee those pinions with which thou delightest  
 Sublime o'er her boundless dominions to rove;  
 The tongue too she gave thee with which thou invitest  
 Each ear to thy stories of wonder and love.

And when evening shall free thee from Nature's decays,\*  
 And release thee from Study's severest control,  
 Oh warm thee in Fancy's enlivening rays;  
 And wash the dark spots of disease from thy soul.

And let not the spirit of Poesy sleep;  
 Of Fairies and Genii continue to tell—  
 Nor suffer the innocent deer's timid leap  
 To fright the wild bee from her flowery bell.

G. F. M.

\* Alluding to his medical character.

Now there is no doubt at all that 'the poetical friend' to whom these verses were addressed was John Keats, and that the G. F. M. who wrote them was George Felton Mathew. They were published about a year after they were actually written; for there is good reason to suppose that the writing of them was done in October or November 1815.

Mathew's poor verses are redeemed from nullity by their intimate connexion with three poems in Keats' first volume. The first poem of Keats' with which they are connected is almost as poor as Mathew's own; it is the poem written *On receiving a curious Shell, and a copy of Verses, from the same Ladies*—the Ladies to whom the previous poem, beginning 'What though while the wonders of nature exploring', was addressed. Both these poems are in the same vein of imitation Tom Moore, and in the same metre as Mathew's verses to his 'poetical friend' John Keats. The con-

nexion between Mathew's verses and Keats', as we have said, is intimate. Here are two stanzas from Keats' verses :

Ah, courteous Sir Knight, with large joy thou art crown'd;  
Full many the glories that brighten thy youth!  
I will tell thee my blisses which richly abound  
In magical powers to bless, and to sooth.

Adieu, valiant Eric! with joy thou art crown'd;  
Full many the glories that brighten thy youth,  
I too have my blisses, which richly abound  
In magical powers to bless, and to sooth.

Here is a stanza from Mathew:

It is not the climate, or scenery round,  
It was not the nurse that attended thy youth;  
That gave thee those blisses which richly abound  
In magical numbers to charm, and to soothe.

Undoubtedly, one is deliberately copied from the other; and it is Mathew who is copying from Keats. Internal evidence supports this; and there is also the fact that Mr. Buxton Forman discovered a manuscript of Keats' verses *To some Ladies* which was inscribed 'To the Misses M.'—namely, the Misses Mathew. Mathew had some 'poetical' cousins.

The second poem of Keats with which Mathew's verses are intimately connected is infinitely better poetry, indeed the best poetry Keats had yet written—the sonnet on *Solitude*:

O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,  
Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,—  
Nature's observatory—whence the dell,  
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,  
May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep  
'Mongst boughs pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap  
Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.  
But though I'd gladly trace these scenes with thee  
Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,  
Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,  
Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be  
Almost the highest bliss of human-kind  
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

Here is Mathew's allusion to this sonnet:

And let not the spirit of Poesy sleep  
Of Fairies and Genii continue to tell—  
Nor suffer the innocent deer's timid leap  
To fright the wild bee from her flowery bell.

Here, again, it is manifest that Mathew is copying the phrase of Keats. As rearranged by Mathew, and in the new context, the phrase is really nonsensical. Why on earth should the innocent deer be prevented from frightening the wild bee? And why should Keats be called upon to perform this unnecessary duty? Mathew had a muddled head. But he was anxious to work in Keats' phrase into his verses by way of compliment; and he did it as best he could.

The necessary conclusion, already drawn from these facts by Miss Amy Lowell, is that both poems of Keats—*To the Same Ladies* . . . and the sonnet on *Solitude*—were before Mathew's eyes, or in his memory, when he composed his stanzas to his 'poetical friend'. The first poem was, we may presume, actually in his cousins' possession; and there is good reason to suppose that *O Solitude* was addressed to himself. I have not much doubt that the 'two kindred spirits' of the last line of the sonnet are Keats and Mathew.

The third poem of Keats with which Mathew's verses are intimately connected is the *Epistle to Mathew*. Fortunately this poem is definitely dated 'November 1815' in Keats' first volume. Moreover, it seems to me evident that the *Epistle* is a reply to Mathew's verses:

Too partial friend! fain would I follow thee  
Past each horizon of fine poesy;  
Fain would I echo back each pleasant note . . .  
But 'tis impossible; far different cares  
Beckon me sternly from 'soft Lydian airs' . . .  
But might I now each passing moment give  
To the coy muse, with me she would not live  
In this dark city . . .

This is surely Keats' answer to Mathew's appeal, with its 'allusion to his medical character':

And when evening shall free thee from Nature's decays,  
And release thee from Study's severest control,  
Oh warm thee in Fancy's enlivening rays;  
And wash the dark spots of disease from thy soul.

And the correspondence is still more striking when, at the end of the *Epistle*, Keats follows Mathew's lead and returns the compliment by speculating on the manner of *his* nativity. 'O where', Mathew had sung,

O where did thine infancy open its eyes?  
And who was the nurse that attended thy spring?—  
For sure thou'rt exotic to these frigid skies,  
So splendid the song that thou lovest to sing.

It is not the climate, or scenery round,  
It was not the nurse that attended thy youth;  
That gave thee those blisses which richly abound  
In magical numbers to charm, and to soothe.

O no!—'tis the Queen of those regions of air—  
The gay fields of Fancy—thy spirit has blest;  
She cherish'd thy childhood with fostering care,  
And nurtur'd her boy with the milk of her breast.

In response to which Keats goes one better :

For thou wast once a flowret blooming wild,  
Close to the source, bright, pure, and undefil'd,  
Whence gush the streams of song; in happy hour  
Some chaste Diana from her shady bower . . .  
Beheld thee, pluck'd thee, cast thee in the stream  
To meet her glorious brother's greeting beam.  
I marvel much that thou hast never told  
How, from a flower, into a fish of gold,  
Apollo chang'd thee; how thou next did seem  
A black-eyed swan upon the widening stream;  
And when thou didst first in that mirror trace  
The placid features of a human face.

Such prodigality of metamorphosis was beyond Mathew's compass.

The sequence of the whole series of poems seems clear. First, the two poems addressed and sent to Mathew's cousins; then, *O Solitude* addressed and sent to Mathew; then, Mathew's elegantly allusive invocation to his 'poetical friend'; and, finally, Keats' *Epistle*, dated November 1815. One conclusion of some consequence is that *O Solitude* must be dated before the *Epistle*.

Again, it is obvious from the first of Keats' poems to the Misses Mathew that they have been for their summer holiday to the sea-

side, whence they had brought what George Keats describes as 'a most beautiful Dome shaped shell', which, together with a manuscript copy of Tom Moore's *The Wreath and the Chain*, they had presented to Keats. Allowing August or September for their seaside holiday, we may suppose that Keats' two sets of album verses, and his much better sonnet, belong to October 1815.

And this fits the facts of Keats' biography. It was on 1st October that he was entered as a student at Guy's Hospital, and probably a few days before that he established himself as a solitary lodger at 8 Dean Street, Borough, hard by the hospital. Enfield and Edmonton, to which he had been used, were pure country in those days; and solitary lodging in the dingy Borough must have been singularly oppressive to him at first. Some time in October 1815 is the natural date for *O Solitude*, with its still present memories of rural summer and its acute reaction to the 'jumbled heap of murky buildings' in which he was now imprisoned.

Keats' enthusiastic association with the 'elegant, pure, and aerial minds' of Mathew and his female cousins is not very pleasant to contemplate. But genius must begin how it can. And we can even find it in our hearts to be grateful to the encouragement given to Keats' poetry, though to the poorest vein in it, by his acquaintance with the priggish Mathew.

For Mathew was a prig. There is at Crewe House, among the collection of documents which Lord Houghton used for his life of Keats, a distastefully obsequious letter from Mathew imploring the influential Member of Parliament to get him some small post. The tone of the letter is unpleasant—utterly different from the manly and generous independence of J. H. Reynolds. Reynolds, in middle age, had made no more success of his life than Mathew; but he writes as man to man, never dreams of asking for favours, and is deeply concerned for the fame of Keats. But Reynolds was one of the best and most gifted friends Keats ever had; and Mathew is not to be judged by that high standard. Nevertheless, it would be hard to forgive the self-righteousness with which Mathew deplores Keats' lack of moral principle compared to his own abundance of it, if we did not remember how pathetically ineffective must have been such an appeal when addressed to Richard Monckton Milnes.

That belongs to subsequent history. Mathew was to show his metal long before. In the *European Magazine* for June 1817 he reviewed Keats' volume of poems, in terms that are simply in-

sufferable. It is no wonder that Keats had dropped him; and that after the *Epistle*, George Felton Mathew's name occurs nowhere in Keats' poetry or his letters.

But the review is a very interesting document. It is easy enough to read between its lines, and reconstruct from its hints a minor, but not unimportant, chapter in Keats' history. In reading the review, we are quickly conscious that Mathew is resentful about something. At first we are disposed to put it down to simple jealousy; the poetaster is uncomfortably aware that his friend is a poet. But very soon the terms of the criticism of *Calidore* put us on the alert.\*

This fragment [says G. F. M.] is as pretty and as innocent as childishness can make it, save that it savours too much—as do indeed almost all these poems—of the foppery and affectation of Leigh Hunt!

Leigh Hunt is the villain. We guess what has happened. Keats has deserted Mathew for Hunt; or rather Hunt has taken up John Keats, and has not taken up George Mathew. The next lines confirm the guess.

We shall pass over to the last of some minor pieces printed in the middle of the book, of superior versification, indeed, but of which, therefore, he seemed to be partly ashamed, from a declaration that they were written earlier than the rest.

Mathew is referring, of course, to the little note inserted in Keats' volume at the bottom of the page containing the 'Dedication to Leigh Hunt Esq.' 'The Short Pieces in the middle of the Book, as well as some of the Sonnets, were written at an earlier period than the rest of the Poems.' The short pieces in the middle of the book contain the two sets of album verses to Mathew's cousins. It is these which Mathew describes as 'of superior versification'—very naturally, because their versification—the worst Keats ever indulged in—is precisely the same as that of his own effusion to his 'poetical friend'. Mathew's little barb is comic. They are of superior versification; 'therefore' Keats seems to be partly ashamed of them. Mathew's attitude is that Keats, in abandoning the manufacture of album verses and the society of 'elegant, pure, and aerial minds', has forsaken poetry itself. Condescendingly he goes on to observe that 'there are some good sonnets; that on first looking into Chapman's Homer, though absurd in its application, is a fair specimen . . .' "Till I heard Chapman speak

out loud and bold" is, however, a bad line—not only as it breaks the metaphor—but as it blows out the whole sonnet into an unseemly hyperbole. Consistent with this sonnet is a passage in his "Sleep and Poetry". 'Consistent with the sonnet' means consistent in mixed metaphor and unseemly hyperbole; and Mathew quotes a long passage from Keats' tirade against eighteenth-century poetry, beginning:

A schism  
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism  
Made great Apollo blush for this his land . . .

On this Mathew comments with pompous severity:

These lines are indeed satirical and poignant, but levelled at the author of *Eloise*, and of *Windsor Forest*; of the *Essays* and the *Satires*, they will form no sun, no centre of a system; but like the moon exploded from the South Sea, the mere satellite will revolve only around the head of its own author, and reflect upon him an unchanging face of ridicule and rebuke. Like Balaam's ass before the angel, offensive only to the power that goads it on.

For a professed critic of mixed metaphor, this is good. But a reference to the passage of 'Sleep and Poetry' which immediately precedes that quoted by Mathew partly explains his cumbrous imagery. Keats speaks of English poetry before the Augustan 'corruption', and asks:

Who could paragon  
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise  
Of harmony, to where it aye will poise  
Its mighty self of convoluting sound  
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,  
Eternally around a dizzy void?

No such planet, says Mathew with ponderous sarcasm, will be found in Keats' lines abusing the eighteenth century: they will revolve only round his own head.

We might transcribe the whole volume [Mathew goes on] were we to point out every instance of the luxuriance of his imagination, and the puerility of his sentiments . . . Feeble and false thoughts are easily lost sight of in the redundancy of poetical decoration.'

A few more quotations, held up in disapproval, prepare us for a majestic peroration. Let Mr. Keats remember

That there is a sublimer height to which the spirit of the muse may soar; and that her arm is able to uphold the adamant shield of virtue, and guard the soul from those insinuating sentiments, so fatally inculcated by many of the most popular writers of the day, equally repugnant both to reason and religion, which, if they touch us with their poisoned points will contaminate our purity, inoculate us with degeneracy and corruption, and overthrow among us the dominion of domestic peace and liberty.

Here, again, Leigh Hunt is the chief villain. But there was another. Earlier in his review, Mathew had made a pointed reference to another critic of Keats' volume.

The volume before us indeed is full of imaginations and descriptions equally elegant with these; but although we have looked into it with pleasure, and strongly recommend it to the perusal of all lovers of real poetry, we cannot, as another critic has injudiciously attempted, roll the name of Byron, Moore, Campbell and Rogers, into the milky way of literature, because Keats is pouring forth his splendours in the Orient. We do not imagine that the fame of one poet depends upon the fall of another, or that our morning and our evening stars necessarily eclipse the constellations of the meridian.

The reference is indubitably to Haydon's criticism of the poems which appeared in *The Champion* for 9th March 1817. It begins:

Here is a little volume filled throughout with very graceful and genuine poetry. The author is a very young man, and one, as we augur from the present work, that is likely to make a great addition to those who would overthrow that artificial taste which French criticism has long planted among us. At a time when nothing is talked of but the power and passion of Lord Byron, and the playful and elegant fancy of Moore, and the correctness of Rogers, and the sublimity and pathos of Campbell (these terms we should conceive are kept ready composed in the Edinburgh review-shop) a young man starts suddenly before us, with a genius that is likely to eclipse them all.

Naturally, Haydon's review—as this opening alone would show—is on a higher level altogether than Mathew's pretentious turgidity.



It is well written, and with all that prodigious enthusiasm with which Haydon, during a critical period, did so much to encourage Keats. Perhaps, even now, he seems at moments extravagant in praise, as when he says: 'A few sonnets follow these Epistles, and with the exception of Milton's and Wordsworth's, we think them the most powerful in the whole range of English poetry.' But this extravagance is itself critical; the necessary enthusiasm of one who can discern authentic beauty, when he does discover it—part and parcel of the man who, by his own solitary labours, saved the Elgin Marbles for the nation.

Such praise of John Keats, whom he had been accustomed to regard as a poet of the same order as himself, no doubt stung Mathew; but what must have been peculiarly provoking was the contemptuous way in which Haydon dismissed those very pieces of 'superior versification' of which Mathew had been virtually the fellow-executant. Haydon approves of *Calidore*, and then says:

The three poems following, addressed to Ladies, and the one to Hope, are very inferior to their companions;—but Mr. Keats informs us they were written at an earlier period than the rest.

'Very inferior.' That was galling. All that Mathew had in common with Keats dismissed in a line.\*

Probably Keats himself had come to the same opinion. For the position of the little small-type note under the Dedication of the 1817 volume suggests that it was added at the last minute, when it was too late to omit the album-verses without compelling the printer to make up the whole volume anew.

Mathew's review of the 1817 volume is thus a valuable minor document for Keats' poetic history. It records his passing from Cockney and suburban elegances into the influences of two men who, whatever their faults, were men who, in things of art and poetry, 'had known some majesty' and declared their allegiance to it. Hunt and Haydon belonged to another world altogether than the 'elegant, pure and aerial minds'; in meeting with them, Keats came into company that was worthy of him.

Mathew, perhaps not unnaturally, resented the implicit criticism of himself involved in Keats' abandonment of his methods and his society; and his resentment is written large in the review, which was intended as a counterblast to Haydon's. Keats' sentiments are puerile; he has deserted Reason and Religion; he is in danger

of becoming 'a proud egotist of diseased feelings and perverted principles'.

Keats, we may suppose, was not surprised at Mathew's effusion. He had realized, long before March 1817, when his first volume was published, that his path and Mathew's lay asunder. Nor would he be unduly distressed by Mathew's ill-concealed antagonism. The approval of Hunt and Haydon would outweigh a hundred such petty condemnations. But we know that Keats had retained some friendship for Mathew, because there is in existence a copy of the 1817 volume which he inscribed for his former friend. That was a small offering in memory of a dead intimacy. Probably Keats' association with Mathew lasted in all no longer than a few months, and practically ceased by the end of 1815.

What one would like to know, from mere curiosity, is whether Mathew's professions of poetical, moral, and religious respectability were genuine, or whether (as we should be inclined to guess) they were assumed out of jealousy of Keats' genius and rising fame. Mathew was about Keats' own age, barely twenty years old, in 1815. It is not an age when youth is naturally *bien pensant*; but it is an age when the sudden promotion of a seeming equal into society inaccessible to oneself is liable to rankle. Mathew, we may guess, would not have been welcome either at Hunt's cottage or Haydon's studio; and we may also guess that, even if the association of Keats and Mathew lasted into the spring of 1816 when Keats met Hunt, Keats would not have dreamed of taking him to Hunt's. It is under such provocations that people like Mathew are inclined to salve their wounded vanity with the assumption of a moral superiority. Respectability makes a good stick for youth to beat its more gifted friends.

It is, of course, a pure indulgence of the imagination; but I cannot help feeling that Mathew's high principles were not the cause but the effect of his separation from Keats. Keats found it quite easy to get on with 'men of character' at this time, though it became more difficult towards the end. But his real and unbroken friendship for Benjamin Bailey proves that high moral principle and solid respectability did not at all stand in the way of his affection. Mathew discovered his principles, I suspect, after his inferiority to Keats had discovered itself. Then it became part of the fixed creed of the Mathew family that Keats was morally reprehensible. Rather than admit that he avoided them, the convenient legend was created that they withdrew from him. I think I detect traces of this family article of faith in 'the weariful strain of evangelical peni-

tence' with which, Sir Sidney Colvin says, Miss Caroline Mathew in later life replied to a request for some of her recollections of Keats at twenty.

I cannot go further than say I always thought he had a very beautiful countenance and was very warm and enthusiastic in his character. He wrote a great deal of poetry at our house, but I do not recollect whether I ever had any of it, I certainly have none now; Ann had many pieces of his.

And its influence emerges perceptibly in Mathew's account of Keats, given to Monckton Milnes some thirty years afterwards:

Keats and I, though about the same age, and both inclined to literature, were in many respects as different as two individuals could be. He enjoyed good health—a fine flow of animal spirits—was fond of company—could amuse himself admirably with the frivolities of life—and had great confidence in himself. I, on the other hand, was languid and melancholy—fond of repose—thoughtful beyond my years—and diffident to the last degree. But I always delighted in administering to the happiness of others: and being one of a large family, it pleased me much to see him and his brother George enjoy themselves so much at our little domestic concerts and dances. . . . He was of the sceptical and republican school. An advocate for the innovations which were making progress in his time. A faultfinder with everything established. I, on the contrary, hated controversy and dispute—dreaded discord and disorder—loved the institutions of my country. . . . But I respected Keats' opinions, because they were sincere—refrained from subjects on which we differed, and only asked him to concede with me the imperfection of human knowledge, and the fallibility of human judgment: while he, on his part, would often express regret on finding that he had given pain or annoyance by opposing with ridicule or asperity the opinions of others.

There is not, one may remark in passing, much sign of a sense of the fallibility of his own judgement in Mathew's review. And though it is conceivable that Mathew was sincere in advocating his 'principles', the review as a whole reads too much like an attempt to destroy any effect that Haydon's flaming encomium might produce, for us to trust him. But like his cousin Caroline, he goes on to admit that Keats was strikingly beautiful. 'A painter

or a sculptor', he says, 'might have taken him for a study after the Greek masters, and given him "a station like the herald Mercury, new lighted on some heaven-kissing hill".' But having allowed so much, he will allow no more. After thirty years he will justify his review of 1817.

His eye was more critical than tender, and so was his mind. He admired more the external decorations than felt the deep emotions of the Muse. He delighted in leading you through the mazes of elaborate description, but was less conscious of the sublime and the pathetic. He used to spend many evenings in reading to me, but I never observed the tears in his eyes nor the broken voice which are indicative of extreme sensibility. These indeed were not the parts of poetry which he took pleasure in pointing out.

As Sir Sidney Colvin remarked, this last openly contradicts the testimony of Cowden Clarke, who tells of Keats' visible emotion when he read Imogen's story of the departure of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*. But there is no real contradiction. What Mathew thought to be sublime and pathetic would not have appeared so to Keats. By temperament and taste they were opposed; their friendship was fortuitous as it was brief.

The real reason why, instead of remaining a slight acquaintance, it ripened so rapidly into the enthusiastic intimacy expressed in the *Epistle*, and more especially in *O Solitude* is not, I think, difficult to discover. Keats had had to come to London to enter at Guy's; and he was consequently separated from his much more substantial and enduring 'poetical friend', Cowden Clarke, who was still teaching school at Enfield. Towards the end of September 1815 Keats went into lodgings alone in Dean Street, Borough. His brothers were at Abbey's. The solitude of which he complains in his sonnet was perfectly real; and to escape it he made the most of the Mathews. The first letter of Keats which we possess is one in which he gives instructions to Cowden Clarke how to find him in Dean Street, for at some time during the winter 1815-16 Clarke also had come to London. When Keats heard of it, he lost no time in making his whereabouts known to his old friend. Clarke gives Keats' note, or a fragment of it, in his 'Recollections of a Writer'; and says: 'At that time being housekeeper and solitary, he would come to renew his loved gossip; till, as the author of the "Urn Burial" says, we were acting our antipodes—the huntsmen were up in America, and they were already past their first sleep in

Persia.' 'This letter', he adds, 'preceded our first symposium; and a memorable night it was in my life's career.'

It was, I think, the arrival of Clarke in London and the renewal of their interrupted friendship which dissolved Keats' association with Mathew. The brief chapter was over. Through Clarke, late in the following spring, Keats made the acquaintance of Hunt, and through Hunt and Clarke together, of Haydon. The new chapter had begun. Yet, if my surmise is correct, and the sonnet *O Solitude*—which was the best poem by far that Keats had written in November 1815—was addressed to Mathew, there is something a little pathetic in the fact that it was a copy of this sonnet, among the manuscripts of Keats which Clarke showed to Hunt in the spring of 1816, which particularly caught Hunt's attention. It was this sonnet which Hunt printed in *The Examiner* for 5th May 1816, and thereby probably sealed Keats to his vocation. A month or two afterwards he abandoned medicine.

## II

### 'ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER'

GREAT poems have an air of springing fully armed, like Minerva, from the head of Jove. There they are, dropped at our feet like thunderbolts, without precedents or pedigrees: and we must make the best of them. We accept them as happenings, and neglect them as creations. We have no choice, for there is seldom any evidence available concerning the process of creation. To the poet himself, for the most part, his poem is a thing given: his subsequent workings upon it are conscious enough, and sometimes these are permanently recorded in the erasures of his manuscript, but the substance of the thing is beyond his conscious control. The essential activity of poetic creation is either sub- or super-conscious.

If then it is sub- or super-conscious, how can we, how can the poet himself, investigate the act of poetic creation? We read his poem—if it is a great poem it moves us greatly. But what do we mean by that? I am moved greatly by a man's actual death which I behold; I am moved greatly by the description of a man's death—Antony's in *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example. Is the emotion the same? No. Is it even of the same kind? I doubt it. And if we could define the nature of the great emotion which a great poem awakens in us—can we, have we the right to, say that the emotion which we feel in reading, the poet himself felt in writing, his poem? Certainly it is easier to make the assumption than to justify it.

Yet if we once suffer ourselves to be caught in these preliminary speculations we shall not shake off their toils. Let us shun abstraction as long as we can and contemplate a poem—at birth—Keats' sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. It is worth contemplating for many reasons: because it is one of the greatest sonnets in the English language; then for reasons which gain weight and urgency because of this: because it is the first great poem that Keats wrote, because he wrote it at a very early age—in the very month that he became twenty-one—because it was to take him many months, even of his brief and pregnant poetic life, to reach such certain mastery again, and finally, because he wrote it with an astonishing speed. There are not many poems so well worth contemplating as this one.

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But before we contemplate it let us have in mind the story of its composition. We owe the story to the friend of his youth, Charles Cowden Clarke, his young schoolmaster and intimate. The poem was written in October 1816. In 1816 Keats had left school some five years; he had served his apprenticeship to Hammond the surgeon at Edmonton, and had been living for some time in the Borough, studying for a diploma in medicine at Guy's Hospital, and also writing verses.

Keats and Cowden Clarke were in the habit of meeting together for literary discussion. One day in October Clarke was lent a copy of Chapman's *Homer* in folio, and Keats was immediately summoned over in the evening to Clarke's lodging in Clerkenwell to share the feast. They read Chapman together till dawn; then Keats went home to his lodgings in Cheapside, whither he had but lately moved out of the Borough. At 10 o'clock in the morning Clarke found the sonnet on his breakfast table.

That Clarke's narrative is substantially true seems plain from the attendant circumstances he gives. The particulars of the achievement had very naturally made a deep impression upon him. He was at the time Keats' most intimate friend, and he had been scarcely less excited than Keats himself by the opportunity of reading Chapman. (There were no cheap reprints in those days—you had your Chapman in folio or not at all.) And Clarke remembered turning up the shipwreck at the end of the fifth *Odyssey* and Keats' 'delighted stare' at a truly magnificent phrase—

Then forth he came, his both knees falt'ring, both  
His strong hands hanging down, and all with froth  
His cheeks and nostrils flowing, voice and breath  
Spent to all use, and down he sank to death.

*The sea had soaked his heart through . . .*

It is exactly the phrase that would have brought a 'delighted stare' into Keats' eyes. The quality of Clarke's memory of this particular occasion is evident: we may rely upon it.

There is no need to make the vain effort to establish precisely how long it took Keats to write his sonnet. The important facts are simple. It was written between daybreak and breakfast-time one day in October 1816, the month when Keats became twenty-one. It is one of the great sonnets in the English language, and it was the first great poem Keats wrote. If the word 'inspiration' is ever to be used in literary criticism it might be used with some propriety here.

Now let us look at the sonnet as Cowden Clarke found it on his breakfast-table that October morning. Three hours before there was nothing: now a masterpiece, a possession for ever, has been dropped into the lap of the world. It has not quite all the perfections of its final form. By one whole line, and one perfect epithet, it differs from the sonnet with which we are familiar.\* But even if these had never been changed the sonnet would still hold its same sovereign place in English poetry:

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen,  
Round many a Western island have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold;  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
Which deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne  
Yet never could I judge what men could mean  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez, when with won'd'ring eyes  
He stared at the Pacific,—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

What is the impression produced by the sonnet upon us? Impressions of this sort are hard to define: but here one seems to be predominant and recognizable.

We receive an impression of excitement so intense that the declared and actual subject of the poem is as it were dissolved away by it. It is almost impossible not to forget that it is all about a book—Chapman's translation of *Homer*. There is a direct communication of emotion, which grows swifter and swifter, till in the final picture of Cortez, half visual, half abstract, it touches a consummation: the image is not merely stamped upon our minds by the emotional force of the poem, but the image gathers up, clinches, makes tangible, the emotional content of the poem. Cortez on the peak—it is the perfect culmination of the sonnet. All that the sonnet really means is crammed into that final image: it is the flower of the plant, the purpose and the essence of the created thing.

Let us leave this for a moment and examine the sonnet more coldly, putting aside, if we can, the immediate and overwhelming impression. We observe that the imagery of exploration and discovery is maintained from the beginning.



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Much have I *travell'd* in the realms of gold,  
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
 Round many western islands have I been . . .  
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told . . .

From the first line the poet is a traveller, an explorer, voyaging among islands, discovering the realms of gold: he hears on his travels persistent rumours and reports of a great *El dorado*. The word of the conquistadors is helpful; for the phrase 'the realms of gold' is become so familiar, so much a part of current speech, that we forget that when Keats used it it was original.\* And it had come, I fancy, from the same reading whence came his picture of Cortez. '*El dorado*' means simply 'the realm, or the city, of gold.' Keats was, to his own mind, a conquistador, with Chapman's *Homer* for his new-found land.

In the first two lines of the sestet—

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
 When a new planet swims into his ken,

the imagery is slightly changed—he becomes the explorer not of earth but of heaven—an astronomer who has discovered a new planet; but the change, instead of weakening the poem, quite definitely strengthens and enriches it: it gives an infinite extension to its imaginative scope—to the yet unlimited earth the illimitable heavens are added, and by the exquisite use of the word 'swims' is created an impression of ethereal stillness, a background of quiet translunary spaces, against which the figure of Cortez on his peak emerges with tremendous and craggy definition.

So that, on a colder examination, the immediate impression that the image of Cortez on the peak in Darien is the natural and, so to say, organic culmination of the poem, is fully substantiated. At the very outset Keats imagines himself as the explorer in search of *El dorado*, and when finally he likens himself to the mightiest of the conquistadors, at the supreme moment of discovery, he has carried the imagery with which he began to the pinnacle of its potentialities.

It is one of the greatest sonnets in the English language: its immediate effect is startling, and perhaps this cold-blooded analysis has yielded some reason why this is so. The unity of the poem lies deep and is *organic*: in the first line the last is implicit, as a flower is implicit in a seed. And this perfect unity is achieved by

what appears, on still closer examination, an almost miraculous subtlety.

Considered in its imagery alone, as we have seen, the poem is a perfect whole—one single and complex metaphor, as intricate as it is clear. There is a real progression, as it were a crescendo, of the imagery which seems to grow out of itself. It completely satisfies Keats' own demand upon poetry which he formulated eighteen months later.

The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, come natural to him (the reader), shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight.—Letter to Taylor, 27th February 1818.

Almost certainly Keats, when he wrote those words, was not thinking of this sonnet, and yet there could not be a more exact description of its peculiar magnificence. The quality of his unconscious achievement had become, in eighteen months more, his conscious ideal. That happened often with Keats; it is, indeed, the most profound and persistent trait in his character, and this submission of the consciousness to the unconscious was to become, in his brief and dazzling maturity, not only his declared philosophy, but the means by which he achieved his most consummate poetical perfections. And we may take 'the progress and the setting of Imagery' in this sonnet as the concrete example in which we can glimpse the meaning of Coleridge's penetrating, but more intellectual *dictum*, which is so often misinterpreted:

Images, however faithfully copied from Nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterise the poet. They become proofs of original genius only so far as they are modified by a predominant passion, or by associated thoughts and images awakened by that passion.

That is to say, imagery must not assume a *raison d'être* of its own; it must exist, not for its own sake, but as subordinated to the predominant emotion, which it has at once to obey, to express, and to communicate. Only in so far as it does this will it, in Keats' words, 'come natural to the reader': otherwise it will merely distract him. In other words, on the side of the poet the imagery and the emotion must be one: 'rise, progress, and set' together in a perfect accord.\*

And this, the most singular manifestation of original poetic genius, is the final wonder of Keats' sonnet. The unity of imagery and emotion is remarkable: in the octave, the imagery and emotion

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of eager exploration; in the sestet, the imagery and emotion of breathless discovery. The rhythm of the imagery precisely corresponds to, nay is indistinguishable from, the rhythm of emotion: and with a subtlety truly miraculous. For mark: never have the true capacities of the Petrarchan sonnet form been more cunningly realized; the octave and the sestet have each their separate crescendo. The rhythm of imagery and emotion of the whole sonnet is reduplicated in either part. In the first the silence of eager expectation and impotent surmise is triumphantly broken by

Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold;

in the second, where a repetition of the actual effect is impossible, because Chapman's *Homer* has been discovered and the discovery cannot be undone, its equivalent is nevertheless compassed by a master-stroke of intuitive genius, by a sort of imaginative parallelism. The silence of infinite space is first suggested, and against that silence absolute the silence of Cortez sounds like a thundercrash.

Analysis will not carry us farther than this revelation of the intricate structure of the harmony which makes so single and so signal an effect upon us. And, paradoxically, the more the intricacy of the structure is realized the more impossible it becomes to conceive that the poem was constructed deliberately as a watch-maker constructs a chronometer. The complexity, the more closely we comprehend it, the more obviously is the complexity of an organism. To find an analogue or explanation for it we are forced to go to the new-born animal, before whose birth there is indeed a long period of elaboration, but the elaboration is unconscious, and occurs in the darkness of the womb.

Yet, apart from the initial difficulty of applying such a theory to the genesis of a poem—namely, that if the elaboration is unconscious, *ex hypothesi* we can know nothing about it, and it must remain a pure conjecture—how is it possible to call such a theory in aid in the present case when we know that Keats had read Chapman's *Homer* for the first time on the evening before he wrote his sonnet, and that he went on reading it till the break of day? Within two or three hours after that the sonnet was written.

Let us begin our inquiry by returning to the immediate impression made by the sonnet. We are conscious of a certain discrepancy between the emotional content of the poem and its ostensible cause: as we have said, for the reader of the poem Chapman's *Homer* is as it were dissolved away in the intensity of the emotion

it is supposed to have excited. That noble book, in its own quiddity, passes out of question; its function is not its own self-existence, but rather to be a symbol of something beyond itself, a point of crystallization for a condition of thought and feeling which existed in independence of it. Chapman's *Homer*, we feel, has served the office of a spark to ignite a highly combustible gas in the poet's mind into a flash of perfect incandescence. The force of the explosion is as great as the flame is beautiful.

Of so much a sensitive reader is conscious through a simple submission of his mind to the isolated sonnet. But if he goes farther and reads it no longer in isolation, but in its native setting among Keats' poetry of this period—that is to say, if he reads it in its place in Keats' first volume of poetry—the immediate impression becomes more definite. He becomes aware, at first perhaps only vaguely, that this particular sonnet, besides being the one perfect poem in that uneven and exciting book, is a perfect crystallization of a mood of thought and feeling which exists in solution throughout the volume. In the sonnet Keats succeeded in expressing, with a strange completeness and concision, a complex condition of thought and feeling which finds imperfect and partial utterance in nearly all his serious poems of the same period.

The condition is not easy to describe, it needs to be demonstrated; but we may call it, provisionally, the ardour of exploration and the excitement of discovery.

We are first aware of it as a baffled ardour of exploration of two different realms—Poetry and Nature. In the *Epistle to George Felton Mathew*, written in November 1815, he cries:

Far different cares  
Beckon me sternly from soft 'Lydian airs'  
And hold my faculties so long in thrall,  
That I am oft in doubt whether at all  
I shall again see Phoebus in the morning. . . .

Keats was, we must remember, working at medicine in the Borough. The Borough was a dirty place, and the lodgings of medical students there, to judge by Dickens' account of Bob Sawyer's rooms in Lant Street, took the colour of their surroundings. In the same *Epistle* Keats laments that even if he had the time for poetry he could not write it there:

But might I now each passing moment give  
To the coy muse, with me she would not live—  
In this dark city.

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The darkness and the gloom forbid. From the first quotation it is already apparent that for Keats Nature and Poetry are one. 'Soft Lydian airs' are the virtual equivalent of 'seeing Phoebus in the morning'. The idea that he might be the poet of a city of dreadful night never entered his head. Nature and Poetry are one; and he is chained prisoner from both. Again:

O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,  
 Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
 Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,—  
 Nature's observatory—whence the dell,  
 Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,  
 May seem a span. . . .'

Perhaps he had broken his bonds for a moment and climbed out of the dingy Borough; his escape is more certain in a sonnet of the early summer, 1816:

To one who has been long in city pent,  
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
 And open face of heaven—to breathe a prayer  
 Full in the smile of the blue firmament.

What had happened? He had found his way to Hampstead Heath; and not merely to Nature and Poetry in the simple sense, but to the company of a poet. Cowden Clarke had shown some of Keats' verses to Leigh Hunt. Hunt had been, as he himself tells us, 'fairly surprised with the truth of their ambition and ardent grappling with nature' (*The Examiner*, 1st December 1816), and had invited Keats to his cottage in the Vale of Health on the Heath. To Hunt's cottage Keats went often, in the late spring of 1816, and stayed long. (Even his first visit, says Clarke, was prolonged into three morning calls.) He departed reluctantly. Two of his sonnets of 1816 are concerned with his journeys back to the Borough from Hunt's cottage. One describes, with singular charm, his walk back beneath the stars:

Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there  
 Among the bushes half leafless, and dry,  
 The stars look very cold about the sky,  
 And I have many miles on foot to fare.  
 Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,  
 Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,  
 Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,

Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:  
For I am brimfull of the friendliness  
That in a little cottage I have found;  
Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,  
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;  
Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,  
And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.

We are fairly safe in dating that in the very month of the Chapman sonnet; and probably the other sonnet, definitely entitled *On leaving some Friends at an early Hour*, belongs to the same moment. In the first he had been brimful of friendly and excited talk of poetry as he shaped the lines on his long walk home; but the excitement was comparatively calm. In the second sonnet it could scarcely be controlled at all:

Give me a golden pen, and let me lean  
On heap'd up flowers, in regions clear, and far;  
Bring me a tablet whiter than a star . . .

It is absurd, preposterous; but it comes off. The purity of sheer enthusiasm carries it:

The while let music wander round my ears,  
And as it reaches each delicious ending,  
Let me write down a line of glorious tone,  
And full of many wonders of the spheres:  
For what a height my spirit is contending!  
'Tis not content so soon to be alone.

Such was the ambition with which his contact with Nature and Poetry together at Hampstead had filled him. But we have outrun chronology. We have passed from spring to autumn. Let us go back to the spring, to his first meeting with Hunt.

Hunt published a poem of his—the sonnet on *Solitude*—on 6th May 1816, in *The Examiner*. No doubt to Keats, as to any common slave of the inkpot, publication was a tangible evidence of vocation. His mind forsook his gallipots, once and for all. He must be with Nature and Poetry. He walked the Heath; he stood tiptoe upon his little hill, by the gate which leads from the Heath to the field by Ken Wood. It was not enough. He must go away. And away he went, to Margate—to something he had not seen

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before, the sea. In August he writes an *Epistle* to his brother George:

Full many a dreary hour have I past,  
My brain bewilder'd, and my mind o'ercast  
With heaviness; in seasons when I've thought  
No sphery strains by me could e'er be caught  
From the blue dome. . . .

Again Nature and Poetry are one: the sphery strains are caught direct from the blue dome. All his three *Epistles*, to Mathew, to George, to Cowden Clarke, are concerned with a single theme, his consuming ambition to write poetry and his conviction that poetry is somehow directly created in the poet's soul by Nature. Nature is poetry—"The poetry of earth is never dead"—but to his knowledge of Nature one thing is now added—the ocean. 'E'en now,' he writes to George:

E'en now I'm pillow'd on a bed of flowers  
That crowns a lofty clift, which proudly towers  
Above the ocean-waves . . .

So in his *Epistle* the simple fact; in his sonnet of the same time to the same brother George, he tells of the significance.

The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,  
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears,—  
Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears  
Must think on what will be, and what has been.

Let us pause to gather together the scattered threads of this tumultuous condition of thought and feeling. A double excitement was fermenting in Keats: the excitement of a discovery of Nature and of a far fuller discovery of poetry. But the excitement is one, and its unity finds lovely utterance in the lines of *I stood tiptoe upon a little hill*.

Open afresh your round of starry folds,  
Ye ardent marigolds!  
Dry up the moisture from your golden lids,  
For great Apollo bids  
That in these days your praises should be sung  
On many harps, which he has lately strung.

Keats' harp, we may be sure, was one of them. He is at once exploring Nature and his own powers of poetry; and the two ex-

plorations are a single process. Elsewhere in the same poem his power of poetry is precisely identified with his power of response to Nature. Nature creates her poet. The poet's mind is

ever startled by the leap  
Of buds into ripe flowers; or by the flitting  
Of diverse moths, that aye their rest are quitting;  
Or by the moon lifting her silver rim  
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim  
Coming into the blue with all her light.

(There, unmistakably, is the naïve and charming bud of the full-flowered:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet *swims* into his ken.)

And Keats goes on, after an apostrophe to the moon:

For what has made the sage or poet write  
But the fair paradise of Nature's light?

So the ardour of exploration and the excitement of discovery become threefold: of the beauty of Nature, of the beauty of poetry, and of his own power to utter the beauty of Nature in poetry. And as his excitement accelerates, so does his confidence in his own powers. In the sonnet *Great spirits now on earth are sojourning*, there is no mistaking the reference of:

And other spirits there are standing apart  
Upon the forehead of the age to come;  
These, these will give the world another heart,  
And other pulses.

It is to himself.

Now let us take stock of our materials—what we have gathered towards the making of the Chapman sonnet. The moment is apt, for that spirit 'standing apart upon the forehead of the age to come' is curiously reminiscent of Cortez on his peak in Darien. We have the ardour of exploration, the excitement of discovery: of Nature, of Poetry, and of Keats' own powers of poetry. We have an ocean, that speaks to him unutterable things, upon which he looks down from a lofty cliff. We have, if not a planet, a moon, to whom he cries:

O Maker of sweet poets, dear delight  
Of this fair world, and all its gentle lovers;



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whom he had described first in *Calidore*,

Lovely the moon in ether, all alone,

and later as 'with a gradual swim, coming into the blue with all her light'.

The discovery of poetry—the thing in itself and his own powers of it—the discovery of the moon, the discovery of the ocean. Since Nature and Poetry are one to him, why should not all these be the same? But how to express these as discoveries? The moon had been discovered—why not a new planet? The ocean had been discovered—why not the ocean when it was unknown?

A good deal seems to be gathered together in Keats' unconsciousness. Can we follow it still nearer to the point of fusion?

Keats' longest and most ambitious poem of this year 1816 was *Sleep and Poetry*. It was composed at intervals between the early autumn and the winter of the year. Part of it, perhaps the greater part of it, was written before the Chapman sonnet. But in its entirety it belongs to the same moment, temporal and spiritual; and its occasion, characteristically enough, was a white night spent on the sofa at Hunt's cottage, where he lay thinking of poetry, with a picture of Petrarch and Laura before his eyes.

Most happy they!

For over them was seen a free display  
Of out-spread wings, and from between them shone  
The face of Poesy: from off her throne  
She overlook'd things that I scarce could tell.  
The very sense of where I was might well  
Keep Sleep aloof: but more than that there came  
Thought after thought to nourish up the flame  
Within my breast; so that the morning light  
Surprised me even from a sleepless night;  
And up I rose refresh'd, and glad, and gay,  
Resolving to begin that very day  
These lines; and howsoever they be done,  
I leave them as a father does his son.

Naturally there is not much about sleep in the poem; as it was conceived in a night without sleep, so sleep in the poem is but the whiffler before the mighty king—Poetry. From the first we are conscious that the poet is straining to utter a conception of poetry too great for his words. He has had an intuition into a mystery, which he seeks again and again to declare. Poetry, he

seems to be saying, is the instinctive response of the purified soul to the wonder and majesty of the Universe: through the poet the All finds voice.

To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended,  
That is to crown our name when life is ended.  
Sometimes it gives a glory to the voice,  
And from the heart up-springs, rejoice! rejoice!  
Sounds which will reach the Framer of all things,  
And die away in ardent mutterings.

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,  
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean  
For his great Maker's presence, but must know  
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow.

Suddenly comes the bitter thought that he may not live to achieve the poetry he dreams of, and he cries:

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm  
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed  
That my own soul has to itself decreed.

Then he tries to explain what the deed is. 'First, the realm I'll pass of Flora, and old Pan,' which indeed he did pass, though not as the crow flies, in *Endymion*. But that indulgence of his delight in the loveliness of Nature is only the prelude to his real purpose.

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,  
Where I may find the agonies, the strife  
Of human hearts.

Clear enough, it seems; he will leave the world of Nature for the world of men and women. But the reason he gives is startling—'for lo! I see . . . a car'. He has a vision of a chariot and a charioteer, who drives from the sky to the mountains, from the mountains to a concourse of 'shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear', to whom he listens, 'awfully intent'. The detail of the vision is obscure; but it is plain that the charioteer is some strange embodiment of the spirit of Poetry, and that the vision meant much to Keats, for his next words are deeply felt:

The visions all are fled—the car is fled  
Into the light of heaven, and in their stead  
A sense of real things comes doubly strong,  
And, like a muddy stream, would bear along

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My soul to nothingness: but I will strive  
Against all doubtings, and will keep alive  
The thought of that same chariot, and the strange  
Journey it went.

So ends the first movement of the poem—an attempt to declare a mysterious significance of poetry, and a proclamation of his own intention to achieve it.

The second movement begins with the famous apostrophe:

Is there so small a range  
In the present strength of manhood, that the high  
Imagination cannot freely fly  
As she was wont of old?

It is a vision of the present state of poetry in a country which had been its chosen home.

Who could paragon  
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise  
Of harmony, to where it aye will poise  
Its mighty self of convoluting sound,  
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,  
Eternally around a dizzy void?

We note that the great English poetry of the past is imaged as a planet rolling round, and pass to his denunciation of the age of reason that 'blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face'.

Ah dismal soul'd!  
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd  
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue  
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew  
Of summer nights collected still to make  
The morning precious: beauty was awake!  
Why were ye not awake?

Again we note that response to ocean, first seen by Keats a bare few weeks before, has become part of the acid test of true poetry. But now he exults, the time of barrenness is past. There is a re-birth of Poetry, and he hopes that, before he dies, she will regain all her past glories.

So to the third movement. He will be charged with presumption. (He was, and most venomously, by Byron.) He will hide from the thunderbolt, if he hides at all, in the midmost light of

Poetry. Against all charges of presumption he vindicates himself by reiterating his claim that he *knows*.

What though I am not wealthy in the dower  
Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know  
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow  
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts  
Of man: though no great minist'ring reason sorts  
Out the dark mysteries of human souls  
To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls  
A vast idea before me, and I glean  
Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen  
The end and aim of Poesy.

We note that an ocean rolls, a planet rolls; but hardly an idea. But ocean, planet, and this idea were, by this time, all one to Keats' imagination. For this is the idea he has been trying to communicate throughout the poem—the idea of Poetry that he has discovered. He says so: 'Thence too I've seen the end and aim of Poesy.' And, though he cannot explain, it shines vast and lucid before him.

'Tis clear  
As any thing most true; as that the year  
Is made of the four seasons—manifest  
As a large cross, some old cathedral's crest,  
Lifted to the white clouds. Therefore should I  
Be but the essence of deformity,  
A coward, did my very eye-lids wink  
At speaking out what I have dared to think.  
Ah! rather let me like a madman run  
Over some precipice: let the hot sun  
Melt my Daedalian wings, and drive me down  
Convuls'd and headlong!

Better any fate than deny his discovery of the idea, the planet, the ocean. Cortez stands on his peak, and can no other. He looks out before him. What does he see? It is an ocean, after all.

Stay, an inward frown  
Of conscience bids me be more calm awhile.  
An ocean dim, sprinkled with many an isle,  
Spreads awfully before me. How much toil!  
How many days! what desperate turmoil!

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Ere I can have explored its widenesses.  
 Ah, what a task! upon my bended knees,  
 I could unsay those—no, impossible!  
 Impossible!

By these devious ways we have followed Cortez-Keats while he has climbed the steep to the peak in Darien to discover with wondering eyes the dim ocean before him. With him we stare at the Pacific: it is not exactly Chapman's *Homer*, but rather his vast and rolling idea of poetry, and his own poetry to be; and if we are at all his men we feel the tremor of a wild surmise: surely not less thrilling because the Peak in Darien is found in the final inquiry to be situate somewhere between the cliffs of Margate and the heights of Hampstead Heath.

But what can we claim to have accomplished by this inquiry? To have explained a great poem? Assuredly not. The act of composing the sonnet on Chapman's *Homer* remains unique and beyond analysis. But we can, I think, fairly claim to have substantiated the theory that the composition of a *great* poem is but a final conscious act supervening upon a long process of unconscious elaboration.\*

Can we, with the help of our evidence, more clearly define the nature of this process? What elements can we distinguish in it?

First and foremost, a predominant, constantly recurring complex of thought and emotion. Throughout the period of unconscious elaboration Keats had been continually discovering more and more of what was to him the highest reality: Nature, Poetry, the Nature of Poetry; and the continual discovery was accompanied by an incessant emotional excitement. Whether his successive acts of discovery can properly be called 'thoughts' will depend upon the philosophy of the man describing them; but 'thoughts' they shall be for us, as they were for Keats:

There came  
 Thought after thought to nourish up the flame  
 Within my breast . . .

These successive thoughts (which some would call intuitions), accompanied by an incessant emotional excitement, form what Coleridge calls 'a predominant passion', more exactly a persistent process of thought-emotion.

Second, in the service of this persistent thought-emotion the

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specific poetic-creative faculty has been continually at work to find means of expression for it. These means of expression are chiefly images derived from a series of particular sense-perceptions. Thus, the poet's first perception of the Moon:

Lovely the moon in ether, all alone

is refined to a subtler perception of her

Lifting her silver rim  
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim  
Coming into the blue with all her light.

And this sense-perception is used to enable the poet to grasp his own thought of the nature of poetry. The smooth and lovely motion of the moon is a quality of the poetry he conceives:

More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal  
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle.

So the image of the moon becomes an image of his thought of poetry.

Again, he sees the sea for the first time, and that perception of the sea, with its attendant emotion, enables him once again to grasp his main thought with its emotion. The image of the vast ocean also becomes an image of his vast 'idea' of poetry. Nay more, the very sound of the sea,

which whoso hears  
Must think on what will be, and what has been,

enables him to make audible, as the sight of the sea to make visible his thought. Again, another aspect of his thought is grasped through the vision of himself standing alone on a cliff (at Margate) or on a hill (at Hampstead), staring with wondering eyes at the prospect before him. He is 'a spirit standing apart upon the forehead of the age to come'.

So the poet's mind has been accumulating through successive acts of sense-perception a series of images which can be assimilated into the main process of his thought and act as surrogates for it. And the condition of this assimilation is an emotional and qualitative correspondence. His perception of the moon is a delighted discovery, so is his perception of the ocean—in both the hidden loveliness of an unknown reality is revealed to him; therefore, both in the qualities discovered and in the emotion awakened in

discovering them, these sense-discoveries are analogous to the main thought—discovery of the nature of poetry. With his senses he discovers Nature, with his thoughts he discovers the nature of poetry.

His two crowning sense-discoveries were those of the moon and sea, and those are instantly pressed into the service of his thought: the images of the moon and the ocean can serve at will to embody the objects of his thought. And he is able to think more exactly concerning the nature of poetry because the sensuous images of moon and ocean are become true symbols of the reality about which he is thinking. So that in the process of unconscious elaboration the continually progressing thought is given ever fresh definition and substance by the images it is able to assimilate; and, on the other hand, the images acquire a thought-content. The thought steadily gains focus and intensity; the images significance.

Suddenly this complex of thought and images, which is working itself towards an organic unity, is ejected into poetic form. What occasions this sudden birth? The dominant thought, with its attendant emotion, is given a final focus by a particular event. The discovery of the nature of poetry, which had been going on for months, is consummated by the discovery of Chapman's *Homer*. Utterance becomes urgent, necessary, inevitable. The means are at hand—images long since assimilated to that dominant thought-emotion, of which the discovery of Chapman is the final instance and occasion.

But there is a final creative act. If this unconscious preparation were all, we should imagine Keats in his sestet saying: 'Then felt I—as I did when I discovered the moon, as I did when I discovered the ocean.' But the moon was discovered long ago, and so was the ocean. It will not do. It must be: 'Then felt I—as a man who discovers a new planet, as a man who discovers a new ocean.' Then to his need came the memory of Robertson's *America*, which he had read as a schoolboy. An inexact memory—for as Tennyson pointed out, it was Balboa, not Cortez, who stared at the Pacific—but one definite enough to give the final perfection to his imagery.

Of the last act of poetic creation there is nothing to say. We cannot explain it; but it is no longer utterly miraculous. We have seen at least how the main materials lay ready prepared for the final harmonious ordering; part, and not the least part, of the final harmony had already been achieved; we may fairly say that the actual composition of this great poem was but the conscious last of a whole

series of unconscious acts of poetic creation. And we may hazard the guess that it is this long period of unconscious preparation which distinguishes the great poem from the merely good one; but this is the reason why, in a great poem, the subject seems to be dissolved away in the incandescence of the emotion it kindles; and, finally, that this is the reason why the depths of significance in a great poem are inexhaustible.



### III

#### THE MEANING OF 'ENDYMION'

TOWARDS the end of the Fourth Book of *Endymion*, when the shepherd-prince seems to be as far from his goal of beatitude as he was at the beginning of the First Book, Keats commiserates with him:

Endymion! unhappy! it nigh grieves  
Me to behold thee thus in last extreme:  
Ensky'd ere this, but truly that I deem  
Truth the best music in a first-born song.

Even when we have read the poem many times, the last line of that apology strikes us amiss; the more amiss the more we know of the circumstances under which the poem was composed. It was intended, before a line of it was written, to be a poem of four Books of a thousand lines each: and the reason why Endymion, three-quarters of the way through the Fourth Book, had not been 'ensky'd ere this' seems only too obvious. Four thousand lines had to be written before he could be allowed his apotheosis. Why drag in Truth?

But as we grow more intimately acquainted with what Keats called 'his inmost bosom', we become more persuaded that it was impossible for him to be disingenuous even in a trifle of behaviour, far less in the conduct of a poem into which for the most of a year he put all his adolescent heart and soul. We become convinced that if he said it was Truth that kept Endymion so long from the bliss that was his destiny, it veritably was Truth.

Our first dissatisfaction changes into downright difficulty. We take Keats' word for it that Truth is the culprit, yet we cannot see how Truth may be blamed. We conclude therefore, reluctantly and with a certain sorrow, that we do not even yet understand the poem.

Some, who stick to the orderly allegorical interpretation of the poem, and believe that Endymion had to travel through the elements of earth and water and air before his release, may be content with this explanation. I am not, and never was; though it might not be easy to justify my discontent. This discontent is really based, first on a complete dissatisfaction with the systematic allegorical, explanation itself, as something alien to the poetic idiosyncrasy of Keats, and second upon a conviction, formed by a patient study of

his writing, that even had this allegorical purpose been half so present to his mind as its exponents maintain, Keats would never have dreamed of calling its exigencies the exigencies of Truth.

There were moments, above all in this Fourth Book, when Keats was truly identified with his hero. The tale was a tale no longer. And just after he has said that he would have granted him his happiness before, but for the claims of Truth, he brings himself back with a start to the realization that it is a legend that he commemorates:

Yes, moonlight Emperor! felicity  
Has been thy meed for many thousand years;  
Yet often have I, on the brink of tears,  
Mourn'd as if yet thou wert a forester;—  
Forgetting the old tale.

When that was Keats' attitude to his hero, it was not really possible for him to say that either the necessities of allegory, or the demands of a four thousand line poem, were the Truth which kept his beloved friend, his other self, from felicity. It was something more real and more intimate than that: something that Keats could call Truth, and could not have called by another name. In this essay, I propose to show what it was.

That *Endymion* has, in the large and general sense, a meaning has been acknowledged by competent critics now for many years; and most of these would agree with the late Sir Sidney Colvin's judgment that 'The tale of the loves of the Greek shepherd-prince and the moon-goddess turns under Keats' hand into a parable of the adventures of the poetic soul striving after full communion with the spirit of essential Beauty'.

But that description is brief; and *Endymion* is long. Moreover, the description depends for its cogency upon our persuasion of the reality of 'the spirit of essential Beauty'; or at least upon our persuasion that Keats himself believed in its reality. And this is doubtful. For, though Keats does speak, in his letters and with specific reference to *Endymion*, of 'essential Beauty', it is not as 'a spirit' that he speaks of it. On the contrary, in his letter to Bailey (22nd Nov. 1817) he says:—

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth—whether it existed before or not,—for

I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love; they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty. In a word, you may know my favourite speculation by my first Book [i.e. of *Endymion*].

That is not an easy passage. Though Keats emphatically disclaimed the title of a philosopher, it is metaphysical, and daring metaphysics. 'What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth' appears to mean that what the Imagination conceives as Beauty must be actually existent, 'whether it existed before or not'. Thus, in metaphysical language, the intuition by the Imagination of the essence called Beauty, actually confers existence upon it—which is, to put it mildly, daring doctrine,—so daring indeed that it is natural to doubt whether Keats, in spite of his apparent explicitness, really believed in it.

No doubt here, as so often in his Letters, Keats is in travail of his own conception; it is struggling to be born in and through him. We must walk warily, and our fingers must be delicate, if we are to follow the clue to the end. The clumsiness of attempting to pin him down to this tentative enunciation would be positively disastrous; and almost as dangerous would be the impulse to water his doctrine down. That 'all our passions, in their sublime, are *creative* of essential Beauty' is by no means the same as saying that 'all our passions . . . lead us to communion with the spirit of essential Beauty'. We may, indeed we must, demur to the doctrine that the intuition of essences confers actual existence upon them; but equally we must give full weight to the emphasis on 'creation' which leads to that metaphysical exaggeration.

When Keats wrote to Bailey on 22nd November 1817, he was nearing the end of *Endymion*. Probably, there were only some 500 lines of Book IV still to be written. Perhaps he was wondering how to conclude his poem. Endymion had discovered the Indian Maid and fallen in love with her. Love happened, it was irresistible; and the shepherd-prince could not gainsay it. But he was torn by the thought of treachery to the Moon-goddess; and torn again by a deep sense of his own innocence. He cries:

Can I prize thee, fair maid, all price above  
Even when I feel as true as innocence?  
I do, I do.—What is this soul then? Whence  
Came it? It does not seem my own, and I  
Have no self-passion or identity.

'I am certain of nothing', the mortal author of *Endymion* was then writing to his friend, 'but the holiness of the Heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination'. Here, in the passion for the Indian Maid, was at least the Heart's affection; and it is possible that in the passion for the Moon-goddess was that seizing of Beauty by the Imagination which was either a seizing or a creation of Truth.

Endymion and his Indian lady leap on to the winged horses which appear miraculously before them, and they mount together into the empyrean. Endymion sleeps on the journey and dreams of complete bliss among the Immortals. The Moon-goddess bends towards him in his dream, and he awakes to the presence of the panting loveliness of the sleeping maid beside him. The dream and the reality exist side by side: he turns bewildered from one to the other and utters his perplexity. The mortal pair soar upward on their voyage. Before them the moon rises into beauty. Endymion turns to see if the maid has marked it, and as he looks she fades into nothingness in the cold moonshine.

He passes into a realm of ultimate despair, yet also of final calm.

The man is yet to come  
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.  
But few have ever felt how calm and well  
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.

These beautiful lines and those which follow them have been unduly neglected. They describe a peculiar mood, or rather a peculiar experience, which was recurrent in Keats' brief life, and which was to receive perfect expression in the vision of Moneta in *The Fall of Hyperion*. In *Endymion* it is thus described:

Happy gloom!  
Dark Paradise! where pale becomes the bloom  
Of health by due; where silence dreariest  
Is most articulate; where hopes infest;  
Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep  
Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.  
O happy spirit-home! O wondrous soul!  
Pregnant with such a den to save the whole  
In thine own depth.

Here, as so often in Keats, even the careful reader easily passes over the significance of the words. Marvellously, he says, the soul contains this seldom discovered 'cave of quietude' which has the virtue of receiving into it and regenerating the whole of the pain-

tormented human being. Keats was right. Comparatively few men have made this discovery; and those who do are generally called mystics, or still more foolish names. But the experience was crucial to Keats; it belonged to his innermost self.

From this secret cave of strange experience Endymion is borne to earth again. The 'first touch . . . went nigh to kill'. There he finds the Maid, and he vows that he will live in humble happiness with her for ever. He renounces his visionary quest.

I have clung  
To nothing, lov'd a nothing, nothing seen  
Or felt but a great dream! O I have been  
Presumptuous against love, against the sky,  
Against all elements, against the tie  
Of mortals each to each, against the blooms  
Of flowers, rush of rivers, and the tombs  
Of heroes gone! Against his proper glory  
Has my own soul conspired: so my story  
Will I to children utter, and repent.  
There never liv'd a mortal man, who bent  
His appetite beyond his natural sphere,  
But starv'd and died.

But the Indian Maid replies that it is forbidden her to become his love. His superhuman and his human quests alike have failed. He leaves her with his sister Peona; but something bids him return, and when he returns, it is to watch the Indian Maid transfigured before his eyes into his ethereal mistress, the Goddess of the Moon.

The main defect of *Endymion*, once we have learned—and we should learn it early—to pass lightly over the cloying language of his lovers in ecstasy, is disproportion in structure. But if we are patient enough it is not difficult to disengage the pattern of events from the excessive detail under which it seems at first sight to be smothered.

The general pattern of events in Book IV, which we have related, is certainly significant; it has meaning. The metamorphosis of the Indian Maid into the Moon-Goddess has an obvious bearing upon the relation between 'the holiness of the Heart's affections' and 'the Truth of the Imagination'. Since that relation cannot be one of simple identity, we must suppose Keats to mean that the sacred affections of the Heart, loyally obeyed, lead to the same ultimate truth which is prefigured to the Imagination as Beauty.

It is impossible not to connect this doctrine with that more clearly expounded in the later letter on the world 'as a vale of soul-making', where we are told that 'the Heart is the Mind's Bible, it is the Mind's experience, it is the text from which the Mind or Intelligence sucks its identity.' The Heart, we are told again, is 'the seat of the human passions.' This accords perfectly with the statement, already quoted, in the letter to Bailey. 'I have the same idea of all our passions as of love; they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.' And it is fairly clear from that passage that the passion of the Imagination for Beauty in some sense belongs, with human love, to the passions of the Heart.

The passions of the Heart, in this large sense, Keats says, are sacred. If loyally obeyed they will lead a man to—what? That is hard to say, and no doubt Keats (at least when he wrote *Endymion*) did not know. They were to be trusted, and by trusting them a man would reach the highest, whatever that highest might be. But what if the passions of the Heart are contradictory?

This is precisely the question which Keats strives to answer in Book IV of *Endymion*. The human passion for the Indian Maid, and the imaginative passion for the Moon-Goddess are in fearful conflict. The conflict is resolved. True, it is finally resolved by a miracle; by the actual metamorphosis of the human into the immortal mistress. But Keats gives us more than poetic symbolism; he does, in the passage to which we have already referred as unduly neglected, make a brave attempt to portray the actual psychological process of the resolution.

It may be objected that 'the Cave of Quietude' is, no less than the metamorphosis of the Indian Maid into the Moon-Goddess, poetical symbolism; but since any attempt to depict the subtler anatomy of the human psyche must inevitably be more or less figurative, the objection is no objection at all. And those who, like myself, believe that Keats was a very subtle psychologist indeed will find the Cave of Quietude well worth exploring.

It is as the result of desperate inward conflict that Endymion enters it. Both the Moon-Goddess and the mortal maiden have faded into nothingness. And more than this; not only has his soul been divided between them; but in the cleft between, all constant personality seems to have disappeared. 'I have no self-passion or identity.' But we do not have to gather the condition which brought him into the cave from the story alone. It is quite definitely described.

## THE MEANING OF 'ENDYMION'

A grievous feud  
Hath led thee to this cave of quietude.

The second point to be observed is that Keats, with equal distinctness, asserts that the initial experience is common to men.

The man is yet to come  
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.

Keats may have been quite wrong in supposing this; the point of interest is that he did suppose it. How far he was right the reader may judge by reading carefully the description of 'the native hell' which is transformed for its rarer visitants into a cave of quietude and soul-content.

There lies a den,  
Beyond the seeming confines of the space  
Made for the soul to wander in and trace  
Its own existence, of remotest glooms.  
Dark regions are around it, where the tombs  
Of buried griefs the spirit sees, but scarce  
One hour doth linger weeping, for the pierce  
Of new-born woe it feels more inly smart:  
And in these regions many a venom'd dart  
At random flies; they are the proper home  
Of every ill: the man is yet to come  
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.

It is, as the opening lines show, a realm beyond normal (though not outside common) experience. In it old sorrows are clearly but coldly felt. The sting of 'new-born woe' numbs response to the memory of past pains. It is not clear whether any particular meaning is to be attached to the many venom'd darts which fly at random there. But perhaps we may get an inkling of what Keats is trying to describe from the letter to Bailey (October 1817) which must have been written at very much the same time as these lines. Keats had been ill for a fortnight; the day before, his brother Tom had 'looked very unwell'; his writing of *Endymion* was going painfully; 'in this world', he said, 'there is no quiet—nothing but teasing and snubbing and vexation'. He had felt himself, as so often, unable to write a letter to his friend. It was a moment of Keats' recurrent and peculiar despondency.

For one thing I am glad that I have been neglectful, and that is, therefrom I have received a proof of your utmost kindness

which at this present I feel very much, and I wish I had a heart always open to such sensations—but there is no altering a Man's nature and mine must be radically wrong for it will lie dormant a whole Month. This leads me to suppose that there are no men thoroughly wicked, so as never to be self-spiritualized into a kind of sublime Misery—but alas! 'tis but for an Hour . . .

A Question is the best beacon towards a little speculation. You ask me after my health and spirits. This question ratifies in my Mind what I have said above. Health and Spirits can only belong unalloyed to the selfish Man—the Man who thinks much of his fellows can never be in Spirits . . .

It seems to me fairly certain that this 'self-spiritualization into a kind of sublime misery' is the same condition which he is describing in the Cave of Quietude; and I think that very probably 'the venom'd darts' which fly at random there are those thoughts of human misery which afflict the unselfish man. In the letter, too, is the torpor of spirit which sees 'the tombs of buried griefs' but cannot weep over them. And perhaps 'the new-born woe' may be that 'sublime misery' into which every man may be 'self-spiritualized', and may proceed precisely from the consciousness of the spiritual torpor which can no longer respond to sorrow or to joy.\*

In his letter, Keats is led to suppose that 'There are no men so thoroughly wicked' as not to taste this misery; in the poem he more boldly declares:

The man is yet to come  
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.

But there is a peace in and beyond this misery of which few men know.

But few have ever felt how calm and well  
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.  
There anguish does not sting; nor pleasure pall:  
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,  
Yet all is still within and desolate.  
Beset with painful gusts, within ye hear  
No sound so loud as when on curtain'd bier  
The death-watch tick is stifled. Enter none  
Who strive therefor: on the sudden it is won.  
Just when the sufferer begins to turn,  
Then it is free to him; and from an urn,  
Still fed by melting ice, he takes a draught—  
Young Semele such richness never quaff



In her maternal longing. Happy gloom!  
 Dark Paradise! where pale becomes the bloom  
 Of health by due; where silence dreariest  
 Is most articulate; where hopes infest;  
 Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep  
 Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.  
 O happy spirit-home! O wondrous soul!  
 Pregnant with such a den to save the whole  
 In thine own depth. Hail, gentle Carian!  
 For, never since thy griefs and woes began,  
 Hast thou felt so content: a grievous feud  
 Hath led thee to this Cave of Quietude.

The main sense of those lines is clear. There is a sudden passing beyond sorrow and joy, which comes unsought for. More, if it is sought for, it is not found. It comes when misery has reached its extreme point; then the misery marvellously changes into a profound content. Then silence is the fullest utterance, and hope a sacrilege: then, in this calm ecstasy of despair, the whole being of the sufferer is bathed and renewed.

But the return to common things, after this strange experience, is full of pain.

His first touch of the earth went nigh to kill.  
 'Alas!' said he, 'were I but always borne  
 Through dangerous winds, had but my footsteps worn  
 A path in hell, for ever would I bless  
 Horrors which nourish an uneasiness  
 For my own sullen conquering: to him  
 Who lives beyond earth's boundary, grief is dim,  
 Sorrow is but a shadow: now I see  
 The grass; I feel the solid ground—Ah, me!

There is, if we are not mistaken, a fine piece of subtle psychological description in the phrase: 'I would bless Horrors which nourish an uneasiness For my own sullen conquering.' The experience which Keats has described may be rare as Keats believed it was; but those who have made some acquaintance with it will recognize the perfection of the phrase which Keats made to fit it.

The peculiar importance of this strange experience in *Endymion* lies in the fact that it is the psychological culmination of the poem. With it what we may call the experiential element of the poem

ends. There are still events to come, and those events doubtless have their symbolic significance. Endymion utterly renounces his inordinate quest for the Moon-Goddess, and declares that he will live a life of humble earthly circumstance with the Indian Maid. But the Maid refuses: an unknown power forbids. Then once more despondence seizes Endymion; but the despondence is not of the same kind as that which led him to the Cave of Quietude. It is the simple disconsolateness of a fairy-tale. We have passed from the natural to the supernatural, to which order the final metamorphosis of the Indian Maid belongs. It is the poet's declaration of his faith, or more strictly of his desire to believe, that the passion of the soul and the passion of the body for Beauty are somehow identical.

But since no axiom was an axiom for Keats till it had been proved upon his pulses, we have the best possible warrant for distinguishing between the consummation of his mythological tale and the culmination of his own self-exploration; between his faith and his experience. The self-exploration and experience of Keats in *Endymion* end in the Cave of Quietude—in the peace and unity which he suddenly found beyond and through the extremity of despair caused by the self-division which ensued on loyalty to contradictory passions of the Heart.

And the importance of this reaches beyond the understanding of *Endymion*. This division and despair and resolution into unity forms the recurrent pattern of the inward life of Keats. The process can be traced again and again in his letters and his poems. The travail of incessant rebirth was never far away from him; he was for ever passing beyond despair. And if at the last he fell into the clutch of a despair too great for any sullen conquering of his own, he was not the first hero of mankind who has reached his final peace through a supreme agony of soul.

But this extended scope of the pattern-process described under the figure of the Cave of Quietude does not concern us now. We are concerned with the meaning of *Endymion* alone. To an intimate understanding of that an understanding of the experience of the Cave of Quietude is essential. Keats had to *live* all his great poems. The necessity of living them became ever more rigorous as the years of his brief and pregnant life drew on. *Hyperion* was lived with a completeness and intensity with which *Endymion* was not. *Endymion*, in comparison with his later poetry, was only half-lived. In the main it fulfilled the first part of the plan which he had set before himself in *Sleep and Poetry*:

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm  
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed  
That my own soul has to itself decreed.  
Then I will pass the countries that I see  
In long perspective and continually  
Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass  
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,  
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,  
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;  
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places  
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces . . .  
Till in the bosom of a leafy world  
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd  
In the recesses of a pearly shell.

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?  
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life  
Where I may feel the agonies, the strife  
Of human hearts . . .

But the life of a great poet does not confine itself in obedience to his conscious plan. Though *Endymion* was to be a journey through the realm of Flora and old Pan, it became inevitably more than this. Keats could not keep himself out of it, and with himself there entered his poem the agonies and strife of a human heart.

Herein we find the meaning of the puzzling lines from which our search began. It was indeed Truth which kept Endymion from his blessedness. For a resolution into unity had been necessary in the soul of his author. The conflict between the Ideal and the Real which divided the soul of his hero was too intimate and real to Keats himself to be speciously resolved by a poetic miracle. That might have been possible when his poem began; but things had happened since then. The abstract parable had become the painful adventure of his own soul. The resolution of the conflict must be a real and a lived resolution; to invoke a miracle, simply to tell the legendary story, was a kind of a cheating. Once let the conflict have been resolved in his own experience, then the story could flow onward to its destined and happy end. The necessary Truth was there.

At a later time, when he came to sing 'the lute-voiced brother' of Endymion, the correspondence between the progress of his poem and the process of his own experience was to be still more close and exacting. *Hyperion* stopped abruptly at the beginning of the third book. Keats was not then in the mood to allow himself the luxury

of prolonged invention; nor, indeed, was he ever in such a mood again. In *Endymion* he was free enough from the compulsion of his own veracity to fulfil at least the outward form of his plan. That was conceived in independence of his own spiritual history; it was something objective—a work to be done, and to be done like a workman, with his stint of fifty lines a day. But the genius who inhabits every man of genius, if he veritably is a genius, intervened: not so violently, or so completely, as he intervened in *Hyperion*, but enough to trouble the substance of what should have been a lovely fairy-tale, of what still is a lovely fairy-tale, but also is something more by virtue of that alien vibration—not merely 'the test of his invention' which he intended, but a trial of his soul.

*Endymion* is thus something more than a work of that joyful 'first period' which is familiar to us in the work of great poets and musicians: it is, essentially, a transition piece. It begins in a first period and ends in a second.

This 'first period' of Keats was more carefully defined by himself a few months after he had finished *Endymion*, when the work of revision was over and the poem put away from himself for ever.

I compare human life [he wrote to Reynolds on 3rd May 1818, almost exactly a year after the beginning of *Endymion*] to a large Mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us—we no sooner get into the second Chamber which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression—whereby this Chamber of Maiden-Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and

evil; we are in a mist, *we* are now in that state, we feel the 'Burden of the Mystery'.

The letter is familiar; but these letters of Keats can never become familiar enough. They are alive: every time we renew an acquaintance with them (which ought never to be really interrupted) they reveal new beauty and new truth.

It is customary to regard this letter as defining two periods in Keats' poetic life. Two Chambers, two periods—the equation is simple. But, in fact, the periods or phases are plainly three. There is the thoughtless delight of pure experience; there is the delight of awakening thought; and there is the pain and perplexity of fully awakened thought—the torment of the longing to find pattern and purpose in the Universe.

Perhaps the most perfect expression of the first two phases is in *Sleep and Poetry*. There is the sheer delight in pure and thoughtless experience; there is also the sheer intoxication of Maiden Thought. And that is all. There is just a tremor of awareness of the 'dark passages' and no more. But in *Endymion*, there is not only the delight of pure and thoughtless experience, and the intoxication of Maiden Thought (was it ever more wonderfully expressed than in the lines of the Hymn to Pan:

Be still the unimaginable lodge  
For solitary thinkings; such as dodge  
Conception to the very bourne of heaven  
Then leave the naked brain . . . ?)

but there is also, in the fourth book at least, the pain of fully awakened thought. The very opening lines of *Endymion* betray an awareness of the 'dark passages'.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever . . .  
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing  
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,  
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth,  
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,  
*Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways*  
*Made for our searching*: yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirits.

In those lines what might be called the musical theme of *Endymion* is given out. Essentially, the poem is the effort to create a thing of beauty before the spirit is darkened; to make the creation of the

poem itself a defence against the onset of the doubts and miseries and feverous speculations, of which he had only too clear a presentiment. It is the poem of maiden experience and maiden thought, indeed, but they are conscious of their doom.

It is as a poem of 'maiden thought' that we should consider *Endymion*—of thought not yet toughened and tempered by the grim fires of experience, of surmises that are not yet, and may never become, certainties.

*Endymion* is a poem about Love. That, in one restricted sense, is obvious to the most casual reader. The poem abounds in luxurious and cloying descriptions of amorous ardours. Keats had his own word of self-criticism for these indulgences: they were 'mawkish'. They offend our taste; and they will continue to offend it until we reach the position which, itself beyond criticism, is that to which all true criticism naturally aspires: when we know that it is not our business either to judge or to defend so wonderful a manifestation of life as John Keats, but only to understand that we may love, and love that we may understand.

The 'mawkish' amorousness is there; and it is a quality to be understood and loved, with all the rest. And that affords an indication of what this 'love', which we posit as the natural and necessary culmination of criticism, really is. We cannot, in the ordinary sense of the word, love 'mawkishness', any more than Keats himself, grown a little older, could love it. The love of which we speak is simply the realization that no existent thing needs justification; it exists, and that is enough. Nevertheless, the name of love is not given wrongly, or by hyperbole, to this lucid acceptance. It supervenes upon an inward resolution in the mind that makes it, and confers a unity upon the being which is analogous to the momentary unity which attends upon love in the commoner sense. This love, which we call metaphysical, is demanded if we are to gain all that may be gained from a contemplation of *Endymion*.

For this 'mawkishness'—this cloying amorous excess in *Endymion*—there are two causes: one biological, the other metabiological. The first cause is that *Endymion* belongs to the adolescence of a physically passionate man, starved of satisfaction. The poem contains not merely that sensuousness of the imagination which is the vital substance, and the indispensable condition of great poetry; it contains also a certain sensuality of the imagination, which, though not unrelated with the former, must not be confused with it. This sensuality of the imagination consists in seeking in the

creatures of imagination a substitute for that specific physical satisfaction of which the biological man is in need. Now there is a sense in which all creations of man's imagination are a substitution for biological satisfactions; but this substitution is a transmutation, or in the language of modern psychology, a sublimation. There is a passing into a different order. The sensuousness of the creative imagination is biologically disinterested. But sensuality of the imagination is the sign of a temporary failure in the process of transmutation. The biological desire which was being wholly transformed into metabiological creation now asserts itself as biological desire; the imagination becomes biologically interested. This distinction, which though generally disregarded is of the utmost importance in any real examination of the vexed question of pornography, can be clearly illustrated from the letter of Keats himself. In October 1818 he wrote to his brother an account of a beautiful cousin of his friends, the Reynoldses.

The Miss Reynoldses are very kind to me—but they have lately displeased me much and in this way. . . . On my return, the first day I called they were in a sort of taking or bustle about a Cousin of theirs who having fallen out with her Grandpapa in a serious manner, was invited by Mrs. R— to take Asylum in her house. She is an east indian and ought to be her Grandfather's Heir. At the time I called Mrs. R. was in conference with her up stairs and the young Ladies were warm in her praises down stairs: calling her genteel, interesting and a thousand other pretty things to which I gave no heed, not being partial to 9 days wonders. Now all is completely changed—they hate her; and from what I hear she is not without faults—of a real kind; but she has others which are more apt to make women of inferior charms hate her. She is not a Cleopatra; but she is at least a Charmian. She has a rich eastern look; she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a leopardess. She is too fine and too conscious of herself to repulse any Man who may address her—from habit she thinks that nothing *particular*. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; the picture before me always gives me a life and animation which I cannot possibly feel with anything inferior. I am at such times too much occupied in admiring to be awkward or on a tremble. I forget myself entirely because I live in her. You will by this time think that I am in love with her; so before I go any further

I will tell you I am not—she kept me awake one Night as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the thing as a passtime and an amuzement than which I can feel none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman the very 'yes' and 'no' of whose Lips is to me a Banquet. I don't cry to take the Moon home with me in my Pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me. I like her and her like because one has no *sensations*—what we both are is taken for granted.

The quotation is long; but it is always best to understand Keats by Keats, or any other original being by himself. This condition of 'having no sensations' is precisely what we mean by being 'biologically disinterested'. The object—the real Miss Cox in this instance—is an object for disinterested and sensuous contemplation, which could not be better described than by Keats' simple sentence: 'I forget myself entirely because I live in her.' And that disinterested and sensuous contemplation directed towards not a real human being but a creature of the imagination is the complete transmutation of biological desire which, we have said, is essential to the greatest poetry.

Sensuality of the imagination occurs when that process of transmutation is interrupted. The poet no longer 'forgets himself'; he 'has sensations'. And these 'sensations', of course, are not the 'sensations rather than thoughts' for which Keats longed.

The author of *Endymion* 'had sensations' more than once while he was writing his poem. But, though the vicarious satisfaction of the biological man was the chief cause of the superabundance and discrepancy of his amorous descriptions, there was another. Keats was trying to express his faith in love; and his faith in love was emphatically not limited to 'disinterested' love. He really did believe in physical passion, no less than in other forms of love; and he was driven to insist upon it. But to believe in physical passion without much, and probably without any, actual experience of it is an awkward position for a poet to be in. He can hardly save himself from a sort of sophisticated innocence, and misplaced emphasis. The emphasis may be right in intention, but it will be wrong in tone.

*Endymion*, we have said, is a poem about love. It is all about love. And love has many forms.

For Keats all the forms of love belong to the same kind. They are the response of the Heart or the Mind to Beauty. Though, as



we have seen, a year after writing *Endymion* he could distinguish clearly between interested and disinterested love, there is no trace of any such distinction in the poem itself. 'Why may I not speak of your Beauty', he wrote to Fanny Brawne in 1819, 'since without that I never could have loved you—I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect, and can admire it in others; but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart.' At first sight there is a discrepancy between this and his account of his disinterested admiration of Miss Cox. If what he said about Miss Cox was true, it would seem that he might quite well have felt the same disinterested admiration for the beauty of Fanny Brawne; whereas he tells her that he fell in love with her the moment he saw her. But, in fact, the statements are perfectly consistent. He met Miss Cox at a moment when he was not free to love, when the last stage of the lingering illness of his brother Tom depleted his vitality and made thoughts of love a crime. He met Fanny Brawne when he was free again.

For Keats therefore impassioned physical love was a response to Beauty. Probably he would have looked askance at the more cynical wisdom which argues that unconscious desire is the great discoverer of beauty in woman. But even that more cynical wisdom is perhaps not really incompatible with Keats' idealism. It may be that the beauty which unconscious desire discovers is really there, and that it sharpens the senses to a true perception of the uniqueness of one particular thing. Uniqueness, it is true, is not beauty; but it is more beautiful, so to speak, than beauty. In the lover's discovery of the enchanted otherness, the divine idiosyncrasy, of his beloved, we may see prefigured that serene contemplation of existence which high religion theoretically ascribes to God, and which some mortals—Keats himself among them—do occasionally attain. If this prefigurement be true, as I for one incline to believe, then we shall find it hard to say that there is any illusion in even the most romantic love. The enchanting thing was really there: what fails, when the time of disillusion comes, is the power to see it any more. Love is not blind; rather, it sees too well.

Assuredly, such ideas as this were not in Keats' mind when he wrote *Endymion*. He had them afterwards, beyond a doubt. His mind was not yet 'sorted to a pip'; it was, when he wrote *Endymion*, like 'a scattered pack of cards', he said—unjustly indeed. He described the condition more truly to Reynolds (3rd February 1818),

with an evident recollection of a phrase in his own poem: 'Many a man can travel to the very bourne of heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing.' There is much 'half-seeing' in *Endymion*.

The great 'half-seen' truth round which the poem wanders is that Love and Beauty are indissolubly united. Love is the response awakened by Beauty in the total being of man. But what was the real connexion between them? Was it indeed Beauty which called forth Love, or was it Love which discovered Beauty? Is it the presence of Love within men's hearts—the awakening of a strange emotion—which tells them that Beauty is there; or is it that they perceive Beauty, and the effect of that perception upon them is to awaken Love?

The problem is a real one, though doubtless the solution does not lie in the acceptance of one of two alternatives. And behind this problem lurks another: What is the status of Beauty? Is it something distinct and definite, so that we can truly say that some things are beautiful and others not, in the same way that we can say some things are red and others not? Or is the perception of Beauty simply a name we give to moments of heightened awareness, of completer perception; and do we distinguish as beautiful not some things which have a peculiar and common quality, but only those things which we happen to see in their completeness, while we happen to be blind to the completeness of others?

These are some of the questions with which Keats' mind was obscurely in travail when he wrote *Endymion*; and they are questions over which the maturest mind might lose itself in speculation. No wonder then that Keats' mind swayed in the winds of self-discovered doctrine. Only when we have grasped the scope and import of such questions are we in some position to understand the depth of meaning, or of surmise, that lies in his seeming-simple statement to Bailey concerning the meaning of his poem. 'I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, *creative* of essential Beauty.' We have at least discerned a sense in which the passion of Love may be regarded as creating Beauty: for that Beauty which Love alone discovers, Love may be said to create. But how can this be true of 'all our passions'? Probably the solution is to be found in supposing that Keats restricted Love in his sentence to the passion between man and woman: and 'all our passions' other than Love are simply the other forms of Love—the emotions aroused by the beauty of Art, the forms of Nature, the perfection of Truth. These, like Love,

'in their sublime', when they are pure and perfectly themselves, discover Beauty where it was hidden, and so 'create' it. And by this road we perhaps approach the meaning of his former sentence:

What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth—  
whether it existed before or not,—*for* I have the same idea of all  
our passions as of Love; they are all, in their sublime, creative  
of essential Beauty.

The logician might puzzle a long while over the meaning of that '*for*' which we have italicized; but now it seems to yield a meaning. What the passion of Imagination apprehends as Beauty must be real; because like all the other passions it conforms to the type of Love, and discovers (and so creates) qualities which were hidden.

Keats was afterwards to refine, or bring closer to earth, this idea of the power of Imagination. Here he seems to regard it as in some sort actually prophetic of, and pregnant with, a corresponding existence. 'I can never feel certain of any truth,' he wrote a year later in December 1818, 'but from a clear perception of its Beauty.' It is possible that his meaning was the same in November 1817. 'The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream', he said then, 'he awoke and found it truth:—I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning.' But if we suppose, as seems probable from the context and the correspondent (and it was Bailey who had had 'the momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination'), that the discussion concerned some philosophic scheme, there is no inconsistency. Keats was contending for his belief that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'. He had not yet entered into full possession of his own intuitive certainty; his statement has something of the vagueness of conjecture.

And we cannot be altogether certain of what Keats meant by Imagination. It is not a word to which he was much addicted. Clearly, in his letter, Imagination belongs to Sensation as opposed to Thought. But at other times we may be sure that what he here calls Imagination is described if not as Thought, at least as Thinking.

Solitary thinkings, such as dodge  
Conception to the very bourne of heaven  
Then leave the naked brain—

these, we may be certain, were the work of Imagination—'Sensations rather than Thoughts'. The difference is between the Think-

ing which proceeds by a chain of consecutive reasoning, and the thinking which moves from 'truth' to 'truth' by 'a clear perception of its Beauty'. Not that this wholly exhausts Keats' concept of the Imagination; but it certainly plays a large part in it.

It would be hazardous to attempt to systematize Keats' thinking further. We must call in aid the poem itself.

'You may know my favourite speculation from my first Book', he had written to Bailey. On January 30, writing to his publisher, Taylor, he specified a particular portion of his first book from which his meaning might be sought. Referring to Endymion's speech to Peona (ll. 770 sq.), Keats said:

The whole thing must, I think, have appeared to you, who are a consecutive man, as a thing almost of mere words, but I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth. My having written that argument will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of anything I ever did. It set before me the gradations of happiness, even like a pleasure thermometer, and is my first step towards my chief attempt in the drama. The playing of different natures with joy and sorrow.

The importance of the comment and the passage is obvious. Here we actually have an example, in Keats' view one of the chief examples, of the apprehension of Truth by the Imagination under the form of Beauty. The same distinction between this process and the apprehension of Truth by 'consecutive reasoning' is made as in his letter to Bailey. This 'regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth', he says, 'must have appeared' to Taylor, who was 'a consecutive man, as a thing almost of mere words'. From this passage therefore we may hope to gain some authentic light on the Imagination, and the meaning of Keats' belief that 'what the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth'.

Peona! ever have I longed to slake  
My thirst for the world's praises: nothing base,  
No merely slumberous phantasm, could unlace  
The stubborn canvas for my voyage prepar'd—  
Though now 'tis tattered; leaving my bark bar'd  
And sullenly drifting: yet my higher hope  
Is of too wide, too rainbow-large a scope,  
To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks.

So far the prelude. It is worth a moment's paraphrase. Endymion says he has always been ambitious of true fame. The motive of his adventure has been neither base nor fantastic. It has failed; but his hope is of such a kind as to be undimmed by earthly failure far more complete than he had suffered.

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks  
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
A fellowship with essence; till we shine  
Full alchemiz'd and free of space.

These lines were added by Keats in his revision. They were doubly well considered. True happiness lies in that which draws us, and draws us willingly, into communion 'with essence', whereby we are transmuted and free of bodily limitation. The process, which is certainly mysterious and may be imaginary, is then described.

Behold

The clear religion of heaven! Fold  
A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness  
And soothe thy lips: hush, when the airy stress  
Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds  
And with a sympathetic touch unbinds  
Eolian magic from their lucid wombs:  
Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs;  
Old ditties sigh above their father's grave;  
Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave  
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot;  
Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,  
Where long ago a giant battle was;  
And from the turf a lullaby doth pass  
In every place where infant Orpheus slept.

We may, without injustice, say that there is a good deal of mere words in that passage. The fancy that hears mysterious music in the winds, or the winding of faint bugles on forgotten battlefields, hardly needed so much elaboration. It would have been better if Keats had remembered the lines of the introduction to his poem, where, among the catalogue of natural beauties which 'move away the pall from our dark spirit', he suddenly and nobly places

The grandeur of the dooms  
We have imagined for the mighty dead.

For these are included in the thought of his speech to Peona. Not merely faery fancies, but high imaginations are in his mind: the enchantment of all the mysterious beauties of the imagination.

Feel we these things?—that moment have we stept  
Into a sort of oneness, and our state  
Is like a floating spirit's.

By these raptures of the passive or active imagination we are carried 'out of ourselves', freed from the quotidian consciousness of the outer world and of ourselves. We are 'alchemiz'd', if not fully, at least in part, and 'free of space'.

That is the first gradation of true happiness, on Keats' pleasure thermometer.

But there are  
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far  
More self-destroying, leading by degrees  
To the chief intensity. The crown of these  
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high  
Upon the forehead of humanity.  
All its more ponderous and bulky worth  
Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth  
A steady splendour.

That is, in its kind, clear enough. All we need to remember is that 'friendship and love' are not in themselves 'the chief intensity'; and that 'intensity' and 'intense' are important words in Keats' idiom. Thus he writes to his brothers (28th Dec. 1817) that Benjamin West's picture, 'Death on a Pale Horse', though wonderful considering the artist's age, contains 'nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality'; and that comment leads him to make his famous pronouncement that 'the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship to Beauty and Truth'. The bearing of this particular use of 'intensity' upon our passage is manifest. When the Truth which is apprehended in the form of Beauty is expressed in a work of art, there is generated an intensity which transmutes the elements of painfulness or ugliness in the thing represented. The work of art is 'intense', and the man who truly experiences it is also 'intense'. 'Intensity' thus is, as we say, objective and subjective; and it peculiarly belongs both to the objective identity of Beauty and Truth and to the subjective response to it.

Friendship and Love are the chief of the experiences which lead to 'the chief intensity'. Friendship radiates a steady splendour.

But at the tip-top  
 There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop  
 Of light, and that is love: its influence,  
 Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense  
 At which we start and fret; till in the end,  
 Melting into its radiance we blend,  
 Mingle, and so become a part of it.

Now the self is wholly 'destroyed'; there is complete communion.

Nor with aught else can our souls interknit  
 So wingedly; when we combine therewith  
 Life's self is nourished by its proper pith.

What is this Love that Endymion is describing? It seems clear enough from the lines which follow that it is impassioned love between a man and a woman. The intensity of this communion is so delightful

That men, who might have towered in the van  
 Of all the congregated world . . .  
 Have been content to let occasion die  
 Whilst they did sleep in love's elysium  
 And truly I would rather be struck dumb,  
 Than speak against this ardent listlessness:  
 For I have ever thought that it might bless  
 The world with benefits unknowingly;  
 As does the nightingale, upperched high,  
 And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves—  
 She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives  
 How tip-toe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.  
 Just so may love, although 'tis understood  
 The mere commingling of passionate breath,  
 Produce more than our searching witnesseth:  
 What I know not: but who, of men, can tell  
 That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell  
 To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,  
 The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,  
 The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,  
 The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,  
 If human souls did never kiss and greet?

Those beautiful lines make it clear that the Love which is 'the chief intensity' is not intellectual, or imaginative, or in any way transcendental, but simply passionate (and romantic) love between man and woman. Endymion surmises that it may be very essential to the economy of the universe; and no doubt, in one obvious sense, it is as essential to the universe as humanity itself. But that supplies no reason why it should be 'the chief intensity'. Its supreme 'intensity' is a matter of experience.

What are we to say of this argument? Even if we are not sternly consecutive men, and do not simply feel that it is a thing of mere words, we are bound to say that it is obscure, and that when its obscurity has been sifted, it does not yield much at first beyond a few simple assertions: that the supreme happiness lies in the complete ecstasy of human love; in this ecstasy, self-consciousness is wholly in abeyance. There are also various adumbrations and pre-figurings of this communion—chiefly, the raptures of the active and passive imagination: the self-dissolution of reverie, and the self-forgetfulness of contemplation or of the sympathetic imagination.

No doubt, to put it thus baldly is to be guilty of a certain insensitiveness. But we are not concerned to criticize these assertions as true or false. And they may very well be true; if happiness is a question of sheer sensational intensity, they very likely are true. Anyhow, Keats quickly passed beyond the belief that happiness was a matter of sheer sensational intensity, or rather decided that 'happiness was not to be aimed at'. We are concerned with the passage chiefly for the light it may throw on the process which Keats described as, when he wrote it, 'the regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth'. When he wrote it, we must remember, was in May 1817. Two years later the process was both more exciting and more intelligible.

But if we want to understand what, in 1817, he meant by saying 'What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth', we must look for the answer here. We confess it is not easy to find. Not for a moment that we believe that the process even then was not real to Keats, or that his search after truth by this means was not productive: our doubt is only whether he knew at all how to express what he had found.

The argument to Peona is but a small part of *Endymion*, however, and though it is worth careful examination in itself, it is in the context of the poem as a whole that it yields the fullest



meaning. Love, we remember, is kindled in the human soul by Beauty. The love that is kindled in the soul of Endymion by the Moon-Goddess is a love of the supreme Beauty—almost, the Idea of Beauty, at any rate something between the perfect type and the archetype of Beauty. In the Third Book (ll. 24 sq.) the Moon is thus conceived; and the passage which begins 'Cynthia, where art thou now' passes, without our being conscious of much incongruity, into:

O love! how potent hast thou been to teach  
 Strange journeyings! Wherever beauty dwells  
 In gulf or aerie, mountains or deep dells,  
 In light, *in gloom, in star or blazing sun,*  
 Thou pointest out the way and straight 'tis won.

Nothing could show more clearly how completely in the poem the Moon-Goddess has lost her particularity, and become simply the symbol of that 'Principle of Beauty' to which alone, along with the Eternal Being and the Memory of Great Men, Keats at this time said he paid reverence.

With this to aid us we may fill out the argument to Peona, somewhat thus. Wherever Beauty is perceived, in Nature, in Poetry—'all lovely tales that we have heard or read'—in the imaginative comprehension of history—'the grandeur of the dooms We have imagined for the mighty dead'—or, finally, in a fellow-mortal like the Indian Maid, the Beauty awakens Love in the percipient soul. These various kinds of Love are the Passions, which (Keats says) 'in their sublime are creative of essential Beauty'. That is to say, he is not sure whether the Love discovers the Beauty, or the Beauty creates the Love. Sometimes he thought one way, sometimes another. What he is more or less convinced of is that the human being by yielding to these impulses of pure Love attains finally to some perfect communion; his self is surrendered, or destroyed, in the 'sublimity' of the passion, and he becomes part of this essential Beauty.

Further, the poem as a whole agrees with the argument to Peona, in placing the passion of love for a fellow-mortal at the pinnacle of this process of self-sublimation. The passion for the Indian Maid is the final step in the ascension of Endymion. Again, the faith which he confides to Peona that Love

might bless  
 The world with benefits unknowingly

receives symbolic expression in the Third Book, where by following the impulse of Love, Endymion—unconscious agent though he is—liberates not only Glaucus from bondage but thousands of death-imprisoned souls to happiness. The meaning of the episode is clearly revealed by Glaucus' words to Endymion.

Aye, hadst thou never loved an unknown power  
I had been grieving at this present hour.

On the whole, therefore, when due allowance is made for the momentary divagations of a luxuriant fancy, the poem faithfully bears out the argument to Peona. To obey Love, and to pursue the essential Beauty in all its manifestations, lead to the same end. They alone lead a man to true happiness, to perfect self-forgetfulness, and to communion with the One. Further, we may say that the apprehension of this truth (if it is a truth) is achieved by the Imagination. It is apprehended under the form of Beauty.

To some, no doubt, a truth of this sort is not a truth at all, but a mere indulgence of the romantic fancy. And we may readily agree that in the form in which Keats expressed it in *Endymion* it is confused and elusive. He himself would have been the first—he was the first—to make a frank acknowledgement of the failure of his poem; but, he insisted, 'it was as good as he had power to make it'.

Now there is only one way of proving the truth of such a surmise as that of Keats. It is, in reality, immune from intellectual criticism. The rationalist may say: There is no such thing as this essential Beauty, to which our hearts and minds and souls respond by Love. But the answer is that there is, in men, this response of Love, whether it be caused by 'essential Beauty' or not. The motion, or emotion, of Love, exists and men can follow it, if they will. They can follow it in their lives, and see what happens.

That is what Keats did. He was eminently the man to do it. He had no use for abstract truths. A proverb was no proverb to him until his life had illustrated it. His argument to Peona, however transcendental it may appear, was not a vague speculation, but something to be lived. It was not easy to live. It meant living by a kind of instinctive and intuitive faith, that the 'affections of the Heart' were holy, and that the vision of reality which the Imagination seized as Beauty must somehow be true.

Much of the dynamic of such a faith depends on what is meant by Beauty, and this in turn depends upon the capacity of the par-

ticular soul for Love. For Love is the sign of Beauty; Love warns us of, and warrants, the presence of Beauty. The man who has within him the power to love all things, and to welcome all experience, finds Beauty where others are blind to it. Not merely this; but Beauty means for him something utterly different from what is generally understood by the name. A Beauty which includes Ugliness is ultimate and metaphysical.

This all-embracing capacity of soul Keats possessed. His whole life was determined by the instinctive passion to achieve within himself that intensity which he discerned in the highest art—'the intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth'. He took no pride in his idiosyncrasy; but he discovered it, and acknowledged it, in himself. He put it to his friend Woodhouse that the poetical character 'had no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated'. Beauty was everywhere; and Love was possible for everything.

*Endymion* does not carry us so far as that. In *Endymion* Beauty is, for the most part, the Beauty of convention. Endymion himself does not yet possess the universal capacity of soul which his author had not yet discovered in himself. But the progress of Endymion is in one cardinal respect like the progress of Keats himself. In following the impulses of Love in his heart, Endymion reaches a condition of conflict and despair. The 'burden of the mystery' grows heavy upon his soul. The way to the universal Beauty is dark, all dark; and the faith grows dim. 'We see not the balance of good and evil.' To see 'the balance of good and evil'—that and nothing less is required if faith in a 'Principle of Beauty' is ever to become a real conviction, and not remain a dubious ideal.

This inevitable conflict in the being of the seeker after essential Beauty, of the follower of the holy affections of the Heart, is, as we have tried to show, faced by Keats in the Fourth Book of *Endymion*. In the Cave of Quietude the divided being of the seeker is reborn. There is a region of the soul, reached by submission to the complete despair which ensues on complete inward division, where the miracle of rebirth is accomplished. This Cave of Quietude, at crucial moments of his painful life, Keats was destined to revisit, and to explore. Always he emerged from it as man, with the courage of his destiny, and as poet, with a more magically natural utterance.

Did he thereby prove the truth of his faith in the Holiness of the

Heart's affections and the Truth of the Imagination? The question is hard to answer. What we can say is that his faith was justified. To believe that what the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, and to believe that the Love which is awakened in the Heart is sacred and must be obeyed, are in reality one and the same belief: for Imagination is the Love of the Mind. To say that what the Mind can love must be True is for some a meaningless statement, for others a secret 'caught from the very penetralium of mystery'. We reach the point where words are impotent. For the Mind which loves is no longer the Mind. High religion knows these things; but we live in an age when high religion is neither accepted nor understood. But to those who do not forget its language we may say that the difference between the Mind that knows and the Mind that loves, is as the difference between the knowledge and the love of God for true Christianity. Christianity declares that man cannot pass from the one to the other without the miracle of divine Grace, by which the nature of the Mind is changed.

No ultimate truth is true, except we love it. Unless it awakens love, it is merely a fact and alien to us. Love alone will change fact into Truth. And this, however strange it sound, is no foolish fancy. For Love is a faculty of understanding, and unless it enters into and transmutes our knowledge of fact, we cannot really know. It is not that the fact is changed by Love; but only by Love can it be fully seen. For the presence of Love in knowledge is the evidence that the total, and not merely the partial, man, responds to the total thing.

That is what Keats meant when he declared that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'; and that is what he had glimpsed when he wrote *Endymion*. Nothing could be true unless it could be loved; and nothing could be loved unless it could be seen as beautiful. Without Beauty, therefore, no Truth. To some it is meaningless or mad, to others the only wisdom. Keats lived and died by it. To those who understand his faith, his faith was justified. For to them his woful and glorious life is a fact, which they needs must love: therefore it is a Truth. Their minds which love that fact, for the beauty which is manifest in it, are no longer simply minds: they are souls. And, in the process of that transmutation, in the despair and suffering which they re-live in his experience, they discover that they also have visited and explored the Cave of Quietude.

## IV

### ‘THE FEEL OF NOT TO FEEL IT’

KEATS’ walking tour in Scotland with Charles Brown in the summer of 1818 is a painful thing to contemplate. We know what havoc the toil and privation of the journey worked upon him; we know also that it was a desperate attempt to prevent himself from ‘having time to be glum’, and to escape the burden of his dying brother’s presence. Escape was not in Keats’ destiny; even the effort after it was an unnatural condition for one who strove instinctively to submit himself completely to experience. Probably to this cause, at least as much as sheer physical fatigue, is due the comparative poverty of the poems which he wrote on his long journey. Poetry, at that time, did not ‘come natural’ to him.

But he wrote one sonnet on his journey which has a strange elusive beauty of its own: *On Visiting the Tomb of Burns*. He copied it into a letter to his brother Tom on July 2nd, with this comment:

You will see by this sonnet that I am at Dumfries. We have dined in Scotland. Burns’s tomb is in the Churchyard corner, not very much to my taste, though on a scale large enough to show they wanted to honour him. . . . This sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half-asleep. I know not how it is, the Clouds, the Sky, the Houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish.

The sonnet is this:

The town, the churchyard and the setting sun,  
 The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills, all seem  
 Though beautiful, cold—strange—as in a dream,  
 I dreamed long ago, now new begun.  
 The short-liv’d, paly Summer is but won  
 From Winter’s ague, for one hour’s gleam;  
 Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam:  
 All is cold beauty; pain is never done;  
 For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,  
 The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue  
 Sickly imagination and sick pride  
 Cast wan upon it? Burns! with honour due  
 I oft have honour’d thee. Great shadow, hide  
 Thy face; I sin against thy native skies.

It is somewhat obscure; but the obscurity is lessened if we substitute (as I have done) the question-mark for the note of exclamation.

tion in l. 12. This confusion was fairly frequent with Keats; it happened several times in *Endymion*. And the change is necessary to the sense. 'For who', Keats asks, 'has a mind steady and strong enough to discern and respond to the Real of Beauty, to keep it unclouded by the dead hue cast upon it by sickly imagination and sick pride?' Possibly also, as Professor Garrod has suggested, in l. 7 we should read 'these stars' for 'their stars'. It would be somewhat simpler; but I do not feel any great difficulty about 'their stars'—the stars that belong to, and share their dream-being with, 'the town, the churchyard, and the setting sun, the clouds, the trees, the rounded hills'.

The main interest of the sonnet is psychological. It centres in ll. 8–12. 'Pain is never done' comes with a strange and unexpected vehemence. We feel that Keats, at this moment, was really suffering. And we should like to understand his suffering.

We may turn for a moment to his comment. 'I know not how it is, the Clouds, the Sky, the Houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish'. 'Anti-Grecian' we understand from the lover of the Elgin Marbles, and the poet of the Grecian Urn; 'anti-Charlemagnish' is not quite so simple. The clue to the mood is given earlier in the letter, in his account of his climbing of Skiddaw. 'All felt, on arising into the cold air, that same elevation that a cold bath gives one—I felt as if I were going to a Tournament.' And another is in his account of Loch Lomond a fortnight later (17th July). 'The banks of the Clyde are extremely beautiful—the north end of Loch Lomond grand in excess—the entrance at the lower end to the narrow part from a little distance is precious good—the Evening was beautiful nothing could surpass our fortune in the weather—yet was I worldly enough to wish for a fleet of chivalry Barges with Trumpets and Banners just to die away before me into that blue place among the mountains.' There was for Keats at that moment in the clouds, the sky, the houses of Dumfries neither classical nor medieval beauty. Not that the beauty which they had was of another kind than these. It was Keats' way of saying that he could not respond to their beauty. 'All is cold beauty.'

This was the pain: that Keats found himself unresponsive. To use the idiom of the end of our essay on *Endymion*: the beauty which his mind perceived awakened no love within his soul.

For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,  
The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue  
Sickly imagination and sick pride  
Cast wan upon it?

The aptest commentary upon this is a passage from Keats' letter to Bailey, four months earlier (13th March):

I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack o' lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance. As tradesmen say everything is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a Nothing. Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—things real—things semi-real—and nothings. Things real, such as existences of sun, moon and stars—and passages of Shakespeare—Things semi-real, such as love, the Clouds, etc., which require a greeting of the spirit to make them wholly exist—and Nothings, which are made great and dignified by an ardent pursuit.

Keats is there half-laughing at a mood which he knew well; he was therefore no longer in it. But that 'greeting of the spirit' which was necessary to make certain 'ethereal things' wholly existent is precisely what was lacking in him in the churchyard at Dumfries.

The mood was recurrent in Keats. He described it twice in a single month (November 1817) to the same correspondent, Bailey.

I wish I had a heart always open to such sensations [as that of appreciating Bailey's forbearance and generosity]; but there is no altering a man's nature, and mine must be radically wrong, for it will lie dormant a whole month. This leads one to suppose that there are no men so thoroughly wicked as never to be self-spiritualized into a kind of sublime misery; but, alas! 'tis but for an hour. . . .

I beg now, my dear Bailey, that hereafter should you observe anything cold in me not to put it to the account of heartlessness, but abstraction—for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a passion or affection during a whole Week—and so long this sometimes continues, I begin to suspect myself, and the genuineness of my feelings at other times—thinking them a few barren Tragedy Tears.

The intensity of this condition, we may suppose, was proportioned to the intensity of the responsiveness which it displaced. A man who believed, as Keats did, in 'the holiness of the Heart's affections' and the creativeness of the 'passions, in their sublime', and whose belief was based on the intensity of his actual experience

of these affections and passions, must have suffered deeply when the spiritual torpor came upon him. It is easy to understand how a moment of self-awareness during such a period could bring with it a 'self-spiritualization into a kind of sublime misery'.

This 'sublime misery' was precisely that 'feel of *not* to feel it' which is (as Sir Sidney Colvin rightly maintained) the true and authentic reading in the last verse of *In a drear-nighted December*:

Ah! would 'twere so with many  
A gentle girl and boy!  
But were there ever any  
Writhed not at past annoy?  
The feel of *not* to feel it,  
When there is none to heal it,  
Nor numbed sense to steel it,  
Was never said in rhyme.

This condition is, I think, definitely to be distinguished from another characteristic mood of Keats—the warm, delicious, diligent indolence in which the Thrush spoke to him, and in which 'neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love had any alertness as they passed by him' but 'seemed rather like figures on a Greek vase'. This mood of Keats, this 'state of effeminacy' appears to have been the immediate prelude to a condition of pure creativeness: witness the richness and subtlety of the two letters in which he records it. That of 19th February 1818 to Reynolds is a perfect thing, culminating in the native magic of 'What the Thrush said'. It has the misted opulence, the unsmutched bloom of ripeness, which is so peculiarly the mark of Keats' genius. In this indescribable stillness our heightened sense seems to hear the secret and simple livingness of Nature. We hear it again and again in Keats, as we do not hear it in any other poet of the English tongue—not even in great Shakespeare himself. And I do not think it is fanciful to believe that condition which seems to have preceded these magical utterances—'the state of effeminacy' in which, Keats said, 'the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body'—was veritably an instinctive self-subduing to the creative power of that Nature of which man is part and instrument. Keats, then, indeed re-entered the womb of the great Mother, and surrendered himself to the unspoken thoughts that stirred within. His utterance then became drowsy with a pure plenitude of life.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time . . .



My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains  
 My sense . . .  
 Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun . . .  
 Deep in the shady sadness of a vale . . .  
 And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire . . .  
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily  
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul . . .

One cannot copy the lines so fast as they pour into the poised, remembering mind. They have a quality such as was never in English poetry before, and perhaps will never be again. The richness and mystery of life seems to inform the very syllables. 'The fibres of the brain were relaxed'; the conscious mind has yielded to that which is far older, far deeper, and far richer than itself.

All is warm beauty, then; the sonnet in the churchyard at Dumfries records the very antipodes to this condition. 'All is cold beauty: pain is never done.' But in the creative indolence, 'pleasure had no show of enticement, and pain no unbearable power'.

I have no doubt that here, again, the intensity of the one condition was proportioned to the intensity of the other. They were the polar opposites in the wonderful organism which was John Keats. In the creative indolence his organic continuity with Nature was entire; in the churchyard condition the discontinuity was entire. (These entireties are, of course, relative; but in comparison to any condition experienced by the ordinary sensitive man, they may be fairly called absolute.) The sense of the discontinuity must have been agonizing to one who knew such an extraordinary condition of continuity; it must verily have been 'a sublime misery'.

To determine the sequence of these conditions would be full of interest. There are precious hints to be had from the fragment of the Journal Letter of March-April 1819 which Miss Amy Lowell published at the end of her *Life of John Keats*, for the fragment belongs immediately before the description of creative indolence which begins: 'This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless'. That was written on 19th March. The new fragment is dated 'March 17th, Wednesday'. It begins:

On Sunday I went to Davenport's where I dined—and had a nap. I cannot have a day annihilated in that manner—there is a great difference between an easy and an uneasy indolence. An indolent day filled with speculations even of an unpleasant colour is bearable and even pleasant doing when one's thoughts cannot

find out anything better in the world; and experience has told us that locomotion is no change: but to have nothing to do, and to be surrounded with unpleasant human identities; who press upon one just enough to prevent one from getting into a lazy position; and not enough to interest or rouse one: is a capital punishment of a capital crime: for is not giving up, through good nature, one's time to people who have no light and shade a capital crime? Yet what can I do? They have been very kind and attentive to me. I do not know what I did on Monday—nothing—nothing—nothing. I wish this was anything extraordinary.

There is an obvious connexion between this description of 'uneasy indolence' and the letter to Woodhouse of 27th October 1818, describing 'the poetic character'. In that letter after saying that the poet 'enjoys light and shade, and lives in gusto', he continues:

When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among men; it would be the same among children.

To systematize these two accounts would be a preposterous undertaking: Keats was not a 'Godwin-methodist'; but it is worth noticing that this latter kind of 'annihilation' was, in Keats' view, desirable. It belonged to the character of 'the chameleon poet', and was not an unpleasant condition. It was the condition of 'enjoying light and shade, and living in gusto'. The attention might be directed outwards or inwards, to observing the people in a room, or to 'speculating on creations of his own brain'; the light and shade might be found in real or imagined characters.

When we compare this with Keats' condition at Davenport's dinner, we find that 'the pressure of the unpleasant human identities' is very slight. There is no desirable 'annihilation'; no possibility of either outward or inward surrender. And, in consequence, the people are described as 'having no light and shade'. But it is plain from the former description, where Keats emphatically says that the 'annihilation' would take place 'not only among men; it would be the same in a nursery of children', that the change is not in the object. It is not that the particular company at Davenport's really had 'no light and shade'; but that, in this condition of uneasy indolence, Keats is unable to discern or respond to it.

This 'uneasy indolence' is thus virtually the same as the condition in the churchyard at Dumfries; it is the painful 'feel of *not* to feel it'. There is the same awareness of an absence of 'light and shade' in the object; for that is exactly the meaning of 'I know not how it is, the Clouds, the Sky, the Houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish'. The beauty is cold. And in the sonnet Keats very clearly recognizes that the apparent defect of the object is a deficiency in his own power of response. There is, he says, 'a Real of Beauty', independent of his momentary capacity of response, though he wonders, and very justly, who among mortal men has power of mind enough to overcome a momentary incapacity such as his.

For who hath mind to relish, Minos-wise,  
The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue  
Sickly imagination and sick pride  
Cast wan upon it?

And perhaps we have a glimpse of the particular meaning of 'sickly imagination and sick pride' in this context. It is the pride of a pre-conceived imagination, and it is sick, because it fails to make the 'self-destroying' surrender to the thing that is. And the consciousness of this impotence, this inability to be true to 'the poetical character'—to be true, in the case of Keats, to his own simple and profound self is an exquisite and intolerable pain. We may well believe that

The feel of *not* to feel it  
Was never told in rhyme.

If we may trust the account of the somewhat analogous condition in the description of 'The Cave of Quietude' in *Endymion*, Book IV, the impotence to respond, when it reached an extremity of pain, suddenly passed into a condition of total organic responsiveness. This is certainly borne out by the fact that his description of his 'uneasy indolence' at Davenport's is immediately followed by one of the most perfect examples of 'delicious diligent indolence' in all his letters: one to be compared only to that of a year before expressed in the letter to Reynolds, of 19th February 1818. And that letter in turn seems to have been preceded by a condition of 'uneasy indolence', for on 16th February we find that he wrote to his brothers:

When a man delays a letter beyond the proper time, he delays longer, for one or two reasons—first, because he must begin

in a very commonplace style, that is to say, with an excuse; and secondly things and circumstances become so jumbled in his mind that he knows not what, or what not, he has said in his last.

We are reminded of 'I do not know what I did on Monday—nothing—nothing—nothing—' in the letter about Davenport.

The two letters of 19th February 1818 and of 19th March 1819, deserve therefore to be carefully compared, as expressions of the same opulent poetic mood. There are indeed no richer expressions of the peculiar genius of Keats' letters than these. I have considered them in their due chronological position in *Keats and Shakespeare*; and cannot profitably consider them again, except that I would draw renewed attention to the amazing pregnancy of the thought in the letter of 19th March 1819. After his memorable vision of men 'making their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk', he turns and looks upon himself and his own thinking with the same lucid detachment.

Even here, though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of, I am, however young, writing at random, straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness, without knowing the bearing of any one assertion, of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings, amused with any graceful, though instinctive, attitude my mind may fall into as I am entertained with the alertness of the Stoat and the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the street is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine. The commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel. [Seen] by a superior Being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine. This is the very thing in which consists Poetry . . .

With that perfect and inevitable conclusion we have a complete manifestation of the mood of 'diligent indolence'. One might describe it as the organic advance to an organic self-awareness. Poetry is the reintegration into organic unity of the would-be autonomous Mind. When the Mind, as it were, behaves as the pure instinct that it veritably is, when it becomes the willing instrument of the total organism, instead of its separated lord,—then Poetry appears. And precisely this condition it is that Keats has already described himself as being in when the letter was begun—the condition when 'the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common

with the rest of the body'. In this condition the human organism can act as a veritable whole: then Poetry comes natural as the leaves to a tree. The Poetry which came natural on this memorable morning was Prose—the letter itself: with all the wonderful animal grace of its unhesitating thought, rich, flexible, swift and unerring, passing at a bound to that absolute detachment which is beyond good and evil. 'Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine.' What could have been more 'anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish' than a street-row? But in such a moment of perfect contemplation, all is warm Beauty, and the pain is done.

True enough, neither Keats himself, nor any other mortal, could maintain himself for ever, or even for long, in a state of such lucid comprehension. But once attained, it could never be forgotten. He had seen what he was; and we see what we are. We are all in this profound sense potential poets, because we are all capable of this complete organic unity. Keats held this faith to the last. In *The Fall of Hyperion* he wrote:

Who alive can say  
 'Thou art no Poet—mayst not tell thy dreams?'  
 Since every man whose soul is not a clod  
 Hath visions and would speak, if he had lov'd,  
 And been well-nurtur'd in his mother tongue.

It was essentially the same thought that came to him in his mood of 'diligent indolence' in February 1818.

Memory [he then said] should not be called Knowledge. Many have original minds who do not think it—they are led away by Custom . . . . Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour and thus every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees.

To yield to Life: this was, for Keats, the secret of Poetry and of the human living. To receive, to lie open, to grow; yet also to strive, to seek, to endure: to strive to the uttermost, and when the organism can no more, to sink back through numbness, and pain, and despair, into the warm darkness of Nature's womb, thence to emerge re-born.

## V

### ‘BEAUTY IS TRUTH...’

Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,  
‘Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty’,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

MEN’S reactions to this assertion of Keats are strangely various. Take two of the most distinguished literary critics of the older generation. First, Dr. Robert Bridges. His judgement on *The Ode on a Grecian Urn* is individual, and needs to be quoted entire.

The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressive, monotonous, and scattered, the attention being called to fresh details without result (see especially ll. 21-4, anticipated in ll. 15-16), which gives an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumbling upon a pun, but its concluding lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.

Thus, in the judgement of Dr. Bridges, it is these concluding lines which redeem a poorish poem. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, on the contrary, finds them worse than mediocre. He quotes the two final lines and says:

But, of course, to put it solidly, that is a vague observation—to any one whom life has taught to face facts and define his terms, actually an uneducated conclusion, albeit pardonable in one so young . . .

Parallel to these critics of an older generation we may set two of the most distinguished of a younger: Mr. I. A. Richards and Mr. T. S. Eliot. Mr. Richards chooses precisely these two lines as a perfect example of what he calls ‘pseudo-statement’: while Mr. Eliot, commenting upon this view, writes as follows:

I am at first inclined to agree with him, because this statement of equivalence means nothing to me. But on re-reading the whole Ode, this line strikes me as a serious blemish on a beautiful poem; and the reason must be either that I fail to understand

it, or that it is a statement which is untrue. And I suppose that Keats meant something by it, however remote his truth and his beauty may have been from these words in ordinary use. And I am sure that he would have repudiated any explanation of the line which called it a pseudo-statement.\* On the other hand the line I have often quoted of Shakespeare,

‘Ripeness is all’

or the line I have quoted of Dante,

‘la sua voluntade è nostra pace’

strikes very differently on my ear. I observe that the propositions in these words are very different in kind, not only from that of Keats but from each other. The statement of Keats seems to me meaningless: or perhaps the fact that it is grammatically meaningless conceals another meaning from me. The statement of Shakespeare seems to me to have profound emotional meaning, with, at least, no literal fallacy. And the statement of Dante seems to me *literally true*. And I confess that it has more beauty for me now, when my own experience has deepened its meaning, than it did when first I read it.

Diversity of opinion could hardly be more extreme than in these judgements. For Dr. Bridges the final lines redeemed a poor poem; for Mr. Eliot they spoil a good one; for Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, they are ignorant and uneducated; for Mr. Richards that still ambiguous entity which he calls a ‘pseudo-statement’.\*

I have no hope, and no desire, to convert any one of these eminent critics. I call them in evidence simply to show the astonishing variety of opinion which exists at this day concerning the culmination of a poem whose beauty at least has been tacitly acknowledged for many, many years. Whether such another cause, and such another example, of critical diversity exists, I cannot say; if it does exist, it is unknown to me.

My own opinion concerning the value of those two lines *in the context of the poem itself* is not very different from Mr. Eliot’s. At any rate, I disagree with Dr. Bridges’ opinion that by their ‘forcible directness’ the Ode is enabled to make ‘a sort of recovery’. To my sense the lines disturb the subtle harmony of the poem. Their very directness is disruptive, for the Ode as a whole is not, in this sense, direct at all. And therein, I think, lies the cause of Dr. Bridges’ surprising condemnation of the Ode, which he places ‘last, or

disputing place with the last' among them all. He has looked in it, necessarily in vain, for direct statement of the kind which is in the last lines; and he condemns it for not possessing a quality which, if it did possess it, would inevitably exclude the subtler richness which it has abundantly.

The direct and enigmatic proposition disturbs the poem, because it does not belong to the same kind of utterance. The poem, as a whole, advances on strong and delicate waves of the pure sensuous imagination. It ends dissonantly with a stark enunciation which, to that part of the human mind which is aroused by stark enunciation, must be a baffling paradox.

Such is my judgement of the poem, even though the paradox with which it ends is full of meaning for me. And I would support it by quoting Keats against himself:

We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself, but with its subject.

This essential condition of the greatest poetry, which *The Ode on a Grecian Urn* for the most part so marvellously satisfies, the last two lines, to my sense, fail to fulfil.

One further point concerning these contradictory opinions deserves to be noticed. Dr. Bridges declares: 'The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful.' Possibly this thought is, indeed, both true and beautiful. But where in the first stanza of Keats' Ode is it enounced?

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.

The thought is surely not enounced in those four lines. The beautiful vase, says Keats, can tell 'a flowery tale' more sweetly than poetry can. He says more mysterious things than this; he says whatever it is that he says in the two marvellous lines:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time . . .



But, whatever it is that he asserts in that brooding and mysterious speech, it is certainly not 'the supremacy of ideal art over Nature'. Nor is there any trace of this thought in the remaining lines of the stanza, which ask what is the legend depicted on the frieze which surrounds the vase.

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities, or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

It is very remarkable that a fine poet and fine critic should be able to make a statement of fact about the first stanza of a famous poem which simply is not true; and it is perhaps equally remarkable that this statement of fact should never, so far as I know, have been challenged up to this moment. This curious state of things might be held to indicate that there is an element of truth in the theory which M. Henri Brémond has so ably expounded—namely, that 'pure poetry' communicates to its rightly attuned reader a quasi-mystical condition of consciousness.

The amount of truth we allow to this theory will depend upon our explanation of this quasi-mystical condition. Though we will reject the epithet 'mystical' as question-begging, we are inclined to believe that there is something peculiar in the condition of consciousness aroused by the first stanza of a perfectly familiar poem, if Dr. Bridges is able to say that it contains a simple assertion which it manifestly does not contain.

If we speak, provisionally, of the effect produced by the poem as the communication to the reader of a certain 'vibration', we may fairly say that the kind of 'vibration' set up by the first verse of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is one which does not easily permit that activity of the intelligence by which abstract propositions are criticized or corroborated. It seems very probable that the 'vibration' induced by the poem is such that it is unusually difficult even for Dr. Bridges to attend to what is asserted in the Ode. There comes a moment, it is true, when a stark assertion is made which neither we nor he find any difficulty in remembering:

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.

We remember it because it excites a sort of intellectual resistance. But even there we do not remember, or do not easily remember, precisely how the assertion is made. We forget, in particular, that

it is the Grecian Urn which says: 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', and that it is the poet himself who adds:

That is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.\*

This putting as it were to sleep of the logical intelligence by the action of such a poem as the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, this curious inhibition of which Dr. Bridges' mistaken assertion and his readers' failure to recognize it are examples, is, we believe, an essential matter and not an accidental effect. We surmise that, if it were examined, it would be shown to have an important bearing on the various difficulties encountered by the critics we have quoted in their attempts to understand the poem. Just as Dr. Bridges makes mistakes in his effort to wrest a clear assertion out of the first stanza of the poem, so the other critics may well be nonplussed by the clear assertion which is indubitably made in the last stanza. Dr. Bridges, it is true, finds no difficulty at all in the last stanza: it is, for him, 'forcible and direct'. Yet his judgement on the poem as a whole seems to be so violently at variance with the consensus, if not of opinion, of feeling about the poem, that we are dubious of his apparent certitude. And this dubiety is increased by his collocation of 'true and beautiful' in his mistaken assertion with regard to the first stanza. The 'thought of the supremacy of art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection' is, he says, 'true and beautiful'. And indeed it may be. But the words suggest that Dr. Bridges believes that the relation between truth and beauty which is manifest in that thought (if it is both true and beautiful) is the same relation between the same qualities or essences as is proclaimed by Keats in the last stanza. This, at any rate, we are convinced, is not true. The identity of Truth and Beauty which may, or may not, be manifest in the thought that Art is supreme over Nature because of its unchanging expression of perfection, is emphatically not the same as the identity of Truth and Beauty which is asserted in the last stanza of the poem.

We suspect that Dr. Bridges believes that it is; that he believes that the poem really consists in the enunciation of the 'true and beautiful' thought that Art is supreme over Nature; and that this thought and the assertion that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' are the same. If our suspicion is founded, it can be easily understood why the development of the thought in the poem seems to him 'unprogressive and monotonous', and why the last stanza seems

to him to make 'a sort of recovery by its forcible directness'. What has happened is that Dr. Bridges has misinterpreted the last stanza as an assertion of the supremacy of Art over Nature, he has then read this misinterpretation by main force into the first stanza, and has finally judged the poem by its inevitable failure to develop a thought which is not contained in the poem at all.

That Truth and Beauty of the kind which are manifest in the thought of the supremacy of Art over Nature are not the Truth and Beauty whose identity is asserted in the last stanza is obvious from one simple consideration. The vase whispers, and will whisper, to minds aching with the thought of human misery, 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'; and to the poet this whisper brings the comfort of a great finality. When he hears the words, he cries:

That is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

That is, of course, in the literal and grammatical sense, untrue. It is not 'all we know'; and some of us do not know it at all. But Keats' meaning is unmistakable. If we know that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', we have attained the topmost stretch of human knowledge; we know, as it were, the secret—the one thing needful.

I do not believe that anybody could, and I am quite certain that Keats could not, have found this finality in the mere thought that Art is supreme over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection. Had this been the thought which the Grecian Urn awakened in his mind, Keats would never have written his poem; nor would he have written a poem at all. His mood would have been the mood of

Though beautiful, cold, strange as in a dream . . .  
All is cold beauty: pain is never done.

The mood of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is the sheer opposite of this. The beauty is warm; the pain is done. Nor again, if his thought had been the simple one of the supremacy of Art over Nature, would he have said:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity.

The thought awakened in him by the Grecian Urn is a thought beyond thought. *Ars longa, vita brevis* is not such a thought; nor does it become such a thought even in the form given to it by Leonardo: 'Cosa bella mortal passa e non d' arte'. And, finally,

Keats could not have expressed this simple thought by the strange and mysterious assertion that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'.

What is it, then, that Keats was saying? We must pick up the clues to his meaning as we can. But one thing is certain. The message of the Grecian Urn is a message of comfort in human woe. That this is no vague and casual assertion, no piece of vulgar and uneducated aestheticism, Keats' life must be sufficient witness. The time at which he wrote the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* was a time of grinding misery. Everything was being taken from him, a brother dead, a brother exiled—and their love was 'passing the love of women'—his new-born love strangled at birth, his money gone, his life in question. Such was Keats' share of the human woe to which, he declared, the Grecian Urn brought comfort. It was more than a fair share of the miseries of the world; and those who are tempted to find the message of peace which the Grecian Urn whispered to him vulgar and uneducated must be very sure, before they publicly declare their finding, that they themselves have borne a heavier load of human agony.

What meaning, we have to ask, could the words 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' bear to a man who was suffering as Keats was suffering then, which could bring to him finality and peace? We do not have to ask, coldly, what is the meaning of 'Beauty is Truth'? We have to ask what meaning it could possibly bear to such a man at such a moment in order to assuage his pain. Again, we have to ask this as men to whom bitter experience is not alien and remote; as men aware that comfort in such an extreme of misery is not to be had for a song. It is not some simple panacea which can be had for the asking. If we know anything of human life we know that words which contain a message of peace in moments such as Keats was then enduring will not be easy words. They may be simple, but they will not be easy. And as human beings we know more than this; we know that they must contain a great renunciation. Such a message is in the words: 'Not my will, but Thine be done'; or, in the words of Dante in which Mr. Eliot finds an ever deepening meaning:

La sua voluntade è nostra pace.

It is meaning of this kind, and of this order, that we must seek in 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', if we are ever to know what they meant to Keats or what Keats meant by them.

The relation between Beauty and Truth was one which exercised the mind and heart of Keats throughout his life. This was the chief form into which his search for a purpose in life was cast. The words recur constantly, and always significantly, in his Letters. They are at the core of his famous definition: 'The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship to Beauty and Truth.'

The bearing of this statement on the last stanza of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and upon the whole poem, is immediate. The statement was made long before the *Ode* was written, while Keats was still comparatively a happy man. In the ensuing time the 'disagreeables' which his art had to 'evaporate' had come to deserve a harsher name. He had been 'convinced on his nerves that the world is full of heart-break, misery, pain and oppression'. The evaporating of disagreeables had passed into the lifting of the burden of misery. The tone is deeper, as the experience is more profound. Nevertheless, the words are, as continually in Keats, perfectly prophetic of the last stanza of *The Grecian Urn*.

The Urn is such a work of art; it is capable of making 'all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship to Beauty and Truth'. The thought came to Keats as he was meditating on the effect of a painting; it was exemplified, he said, throughout *King Lear*—a dramatic poem. And the Grecian Urn, as it is depicted in Keats' *Ode*, is something between a painting and a dramatic poem. It is a sculptured drama. And this is as important to remember as it is readily forgotten. The Grecian Urn of Keats' poem is not some hypothetical actual vase, but the Urn of his imagination. To know what it was, we are not to conceive some hypothetical original, but simply to read his poem.

No doubt, at some time or other, Keats had actually seen and delighted in the beauty of a Greek vase. But that may have been long before he wrote his poem. It probably was long before. The vision lay somewhere in the deeps of his being, to appear at moments before his conscious imagination. In the Third Book of *Endymion* (ll. 29-32) we read:

Aye, 'bove the withering of old-lipp'd Fate  
A thousand Powers keep religious state,  
In water, fiery realm, and airy bourne;  
And, *silent as a consecrated urn*,  
Hold sphery sessions for a season due.\*

It appeared more visibly, a year before he actually wrote *The Grecian Urn*, in a letter to Reynolds, where he complained of the ugly visions which haunted him when he lay sleepless. Perhaps, he said, some were more fortunate than himself, and escaped these evil visitations. What these fortunate ones would see, in their happier visions, would be:

Some Titian colours touch'd into real life,—  
The sacrifice goes on; the pontiff knife  
Gleams in the sun, the milk-white heifer lows,  
The pipe goes shrilly; the libation flows:  
A white sail shows above the green-head cliff,  
Moves round the point, and throws her anchor stiff;  
The mariners join hymn with those on land.

There is the frieze of another Grecian Urn—manifestly no real one, in the practical and tangible sense, but as beautiful and of the same kind as the vase of the *Ode*. The Greek vase was a form into which Keats' sensuous imagination could naturally be cast.\*

Later, and near to the time of writing the *Ode*, the vision came again—On the morning when, he said, 'the fibres of the brain were relaxed in common with the rest of his body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure had no show of enticement nor pain no unbearable power'. 'Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love', he wrote, 'have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek vase—a Man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisements.' This vision formed the whole theme of the *Ode on Indolence*. The Greek vase, with its surrounding frieze, was a form congenial to Keats' richly plastic imagination; it was a means by which he could immobilize, in 'a frozen moment', the beauty of an imagined action.

The Grecian Urn may have been in part actual, or wholly an imaginative creation; that is indifferent. The important thing is the action depicted upon it—the drama, the thing doing, in the actual sense of the Greek word. That is evident enough to any one who simply reads the poem; the vase is primarily a sculptured frieze, an arrested action, of the same kind as the Parthenon pediment.

It is on this arrested action that Keats' imagination intensely plays. He envies the felicity of the participants who are immune from mortality and decay. But they are human still. Mortality and decay have slipped from them, like a garment; but that is all.

They are mortals as we are; who have wandered unawares into an enchanted land, whence they can never return. Their felicity has its tinge of sorrow; the poet who began by envying, ends almost by pitying. They are, as it were, lost to humanity.

And, little town, thy streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

The happening is utterly human. It is to misconceive the poem completely to conceive it as a theorizing on some exquisite piece of decorative art. It is a drama of the pure imagination. A destiny falls upon some human beings; they pass into the spellbound land of eternity,

All breathing human passion far above

and the poet who watches them, who indeed himself has cast the spell of eternal immobility upon them, envies and grieves for them. The Urn is the record of the lovely and yet fatal enchantment.\*

More exactly, the Grecian Urn is the symbol of a possibility of vision. All human action, all human experience, can be thus arrested in enchantment. All the visible and invisible drama of human life can be thus seen, or imagined, under the aspect of eternity, *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is why the 'silent form doth tease us out of thought as doth eternity'. It is not that it is incomprehensible as is the abstract concept of eternity; but that it is terribly simple and lucid as is the eternal aspect of things of which it is a symbol. This aspect of things is beyond thought, because it is prior to thought; and beyond thought because it is the end of thinking. Under this aspect the innocent vision of the child doubtless beholds existence; the grown man can recapture it only when he has struggled onward towards a second innocence. And then he is unable to declare what it is that he sees; it is too simple for speech. What words can there be to describe this seeing of the world and of ourselves with a vision from which all passion has been dissolved away; with a vision which is unclouded by any desire or any regret; by any belief or any anxiety: this moment of untroubled lucidity in which we are unmoved spectators of the great drama of human destiny?\*

For this vision there are indeed no words. Keats declared it in the form: 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.' The words to many are meaningless. And it is certain that by no poring over the words

themselves can the vision which they express be attained. Nor, probably, if we turn them about, like a jewel of many facets, will they reflect a gleam.

We may turn them in many ways. We may say that the Real is Beautiful. The answer straightway is that the Real is full of ugliness and pain. And this is true: who will deny it? But the Beauty of the Real is a Beauty which resides as surely in pain and ugliness as in beauty itself. There is the sorrow which makes

Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self.

But that sorrow may still be called, by our human standards, beautiful. The Beauty of the Real is beyond this. It lies in the perfection of uniqueness which belongs to every thing, or thought, simply because it *is*.

But this is not Beauty. And indeed it is not what men commonly call Beauty, any more than the Love with which all high religion invests its Deity is what is commonly called Love among men, any more than the Perfection which, Spinoza said, belonged to every existence is what men commonly call perfection. None the less, the great sayings that 'God is Love', and that 'Omnis existentia est perfectio', have their meaning for those who understand them. Keats uttered another saying worthy to stand with these simple and lucid finalities. 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' belongs to the same order as they; nor can any one truly understand any one of these sayings without understanding the others.

For the only name for the faculty by which we can discern that element of Beauty which is present in every Fact, which we must discern in every Fact before it becomes Truth for us, is Love. Whether it is Love which discovers the Beauty in Fact, whereby it becomes Truth; or whether it is the Beauty of Fact which causes the motion of Love to arise in our souls, and so to discern its Truth—to such questions there is no answer, nor any need to answer them. The relation between these things is simple and inextricable. When we love a Fact, it becomes Truth; when we attain that detachment from our passions whereby it becomes possible for us to love all Facts, then we have reached our Peace. If a Truth cannot be loved, it is not Truth, but only Fact. But the Fact does not change, in order that it may become Truth; it is we who change. All Fact is beautiful; it is we who have to regain our innocence to see its Beauty.

But this is inhuman, it may be said. And if it is indeed inhuman to be detached for a moment from all human passion, to see for a



moment all things that happen as sheer happenings, to cease for a moment to feel what men call love and hate in the peace of a Love that is distinct from, and beyond them both, then it is inhuman. But this ultimate disinterestedness begins at home. It is achieved only by disinterestedness towards the pain and ugliness of one's own experience; and it is achieved chiefly by those to whom the pain of others has been as their own pain. This detachment is reached not through insensibility, but through sensibility grown intolerable.

None can usurp this height  
But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

Whether or not it is easily intelligible, there is a meaning in 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' which satisfies the conditions which we proposed as necessary. It is simple, but not easy; and it involves a great renunciation. That the first condition is satisfied is abundantly evident from our efforts to expound it. It is its utter simplicity which makes it so impossible to explain. In endeavouring to explain it we feel as a man might feel who should try to explain colour to another man born blind; or it is as if we were required to demonstrate the existence of an object that is actually before our eyes—we could only point to it and say 'There it is!'

And perhaps it is equally evident that it involves a great renunciation. To attain the vision which Keats describes as the knowledge that 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty' we are required to put away all our human desires and beliefs and anxieties. We have to forget all those cares, delightful or painful, which appertain to our animal existence. Our joys and sorrows must become remote as though they happened to others than ourselves, or to ourselves in some other mode of existence from which we have awakened as from a dream. All the infinite, the all but total activities of man, conscious or unconscious, which are directed towards the maintenance and assertion of the instinctive will to live, must be put away. Cease they cannot, nor can we make them cease; but we must cease to be identified with them. They are the substrate of our vision; without them we cannot see as we desire to see. But when we have become an Eye, the Eye cannot belong to them, or they to it. It sees them with the same utter detachment with which it sees all things else. And this detachment is a real detaching.

Than this no greater renunciation is possible. All we are is be-

come object to the pure vision of this Eye. Our secretest desires, our most precious aspirations, the finest point of our being,—all is 'out there', naked to the contemplation of eternity, of which contemplation we are the momentary instruments. A chasm divides the being that we are from the seeing that is ourselves. The renunciation is entire, the spirit is pure.

We must descend. Where we have been we cannot live, but we can always return again. Nor is it by our will that we return; the possibility of this detachment hovers about us henceforward all our lives. We pass into it and out again; we do not know when it may lie in wait for us. A trivial sound or sight may take us there. But if we need it, then it is at our command. We have only to pay the same price for our liberty—the price of an entire renunciation, whereby we separate from our pure consciousness even the finest tendrils of the pain which drives us to seek the anodyne.

To be detached from ourselves—that is the positive and ethical implication of 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty', and the act of entire self-renunciation which is necessarily involved in achieving that self-detachment is the justification of Keats' assertion that

That is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Real has its perfect and inalienable uniqueness, which when we behold, we are content. The Real is not there to satisfy our human desires; it is we who must submit ourselves to the Real, not the Real to us. And the only way to purify our vision and our thought from the contamination of our desires is to see our desires—all our desires, base or noble, high or low—as implicit in our animal existence. We do not thereby annihilate them; they exist as we exist; they belong to the Real, and share the perfect and inalienable uniqueness which belongs to every part of it. But they become Object, where before they were Subject, and by their passing to the other side of the gulf that divides these two the Subject is cleansed of their secret and pervasive influences.

'Poetry', said Francis Bacon, 'submits the shows of things to the desires of the mind.' If this be indeed the function of poetry, then the wisdom of Keats was non-poetical. We are not surprised at the paradox; Keats himself had exactly anticipated it. 'A Poet', he said, 'is the least poetical of anything in existence: he is for ever in for, and fulfilling some other object.' Keats' was the inward view of poetry—the self-knowledge of a great poet; Bacon's the ex-

ternal view. So far from its being the function of Poetry to submit the shows of things to the desires of the mind, its sole aim (for Keats) was utter submission to the real. No doubt there is, and Keats would have admitted it, and would have put forward certain of his early works as examples of it, a Poetry which does submit the shows of things to the desires of the mind. But this Poetry he vehemently disowned; it was the work not of the true Poet, but of the Dreamer.

The Poet and the Dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.

And the world *is* vexed by those dreamy imaginings of a Land of Heart's Desire in their response to which the majority of men confuse their own narcotic comfort with an idea of poetic excellence. But the balm which the true Poet pours out upon the world is not this drowsy syrup; it is astringent, awakening, purifying, clarifying. It induces no slumber, but drives us on towards the lucid and complete activity of consciousness that is peace.

Keats left one unique and priceless record of his progress towards this comprehension of the function of Poetry. It is a document which, I believe, as the years go on will be more and more deeply studied, not merely as a self-revelation of a richly endowed poetic nature, but as a testament of perfect human wisdom. It is that part of his long letter to his Brother and Sister of February-April 1819, which begins with a confession of one of his characteristic moods of 'Indolence'. This is one of those passages of 'full Poesy or distilled Prose' of which Keats once said: 'Let a man wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale—but when will it do so? Never.' Its significance is inexhaustible; it is an organic whole in which every word is relevant.

This morning [he begins] I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless—I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*—my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered till nearly eleven, and weakened the animal fibre all over me, to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl and the breath

of lilies I should call it languor, but as I am I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek vase—a man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement. This is the only happiness, and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind.'

That is the prelude. That the experience, though characteristic, was memorable for its completeness and intensity is evident from its forming the whole theme of the *Ode on Indolence*. From that Ode we can learn more distinctly what he meant by 'his passions being all asleep'.

O folly! What is Love? and where is it?  
And for that poor Ambition! it springs  
From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;  
For Poesy!—no,—she has not a joy,—  
At least for me,—so sweet as drowsy noons,  
And evenings steep'd in honied indolence.

These are the three ruling passions of Keats' life at the moment—the Verse, Fame, and Beauty which appear in the sonnet, *Why did I laugh to-night?* which he copied at the end of this portion of his letter. The sonnet is evidently a record of a grim and victorious struggle to detach himself from those passions; they dissolved away from him in a triumphant acceptance of Death; he saw them as fevers of mortality, and put them away. On this 'indolent' morning, which may well have been the morning following that night of inward struggle, as his long sleep may well have been the recuperation of the animal body from its inevitable exhaustion, the three passions are remote. The organism is at one. From this unity its instinctive and total progress begins.

This overpowering of the body by the mind, Keats has just said, is the only happiness.

I have this moment received a note from Haslam in which he expects the death of his Father, who has been for some time in a state of insensibility; his mother bears up he says very well—I shall go to town to-morrow to see him. This is the world—Thus

we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure. Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting. While we are laughing, the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts, it grows, and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck. Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends; our own touch us too nearly for words.

Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind; very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others,—in the greater part of the Benefactors to Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness—some melodramatic scenery has fa[s]cinated them. From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness. Yet this feeling ought to be carried to its highest pitch, as there is no fear of its ever injuring Society—which it would do, I fear, pushed to an extremity. For in wild nature the Hawk would loose his breakfast of Robins and the Robin his of Worms—the Lion must starve as well as the swallow.

The easy sinuous movement of Keats' thought is a thing to be wondered at. It is so perfectly natural, so quiet, so swift.

The greater part of Men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk. The Hawk wants a Mate, so does the Man—look at them both, they set about it and procure on[e] in the same manner—they get their food in the same manner. The noble animal Man for his amusement smokes his pipe—the Hawk balances about the Clouds—that is the only difference of their leisures. This it is that makes the Amusement of Life to a speculative Mind—I go among the Fields and catch a glimpse of a Stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose, and its eyes are bright with it. I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a Man hurrying along—to what? the Creature has a purpose and his eyes are bright with it.

To the eye of contemplation, men are the same creatures of instinct as are the animals. There is an unbroken continuity between them.

But then, as Wordsworth says, 'we have all one human heart'—there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—

so that among these human creature[s] there is continually some birth of new heroism. The pity is that we must wonder at it, as we should at finding a pearl in rubbish. I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two—Socrates and Jesus—their Histories evince it. What I heard a little time ago, Taylor observe with respect to Socrates, may be said of Jesus—That he was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his Mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is to be lamented that the history of the latter was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour.

There is within the all-comprehending ambit of animal instinct some secret urge which drives chosen men towards the transcending of animal impulse. This transcending of animal impulse is manifest as complete disinterestedness. The urge of the animal ego is completely disregarded; and the evidence of this disregard is a willing submission to a self-sought death, an acceptance of the annihilation of the animal ego though all the forces of animal instinct are arrayed against this acceptance. On the side of this complete disinterestedness, which is the only heroism, Keats had ranged himself months before. In April 1818 he wrote to Reynolds: ‘I would jump down Ætna for any great Public good—but I hate a mawkish popularity’; and in the following June to Bailey: ‘Now I am never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death—without placing my ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human purpose.’ But the record of the supreme example of this disinterestedness marching to its inevitable end—namely, Jesus—has been corrupted by that very thing—interestedness—which he gave up his life to overcome. Yet through all this Keats sees his splendour.

Even here though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of—[though] I am however young writing at random—straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness—without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat, or the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the com-

monest Man shows a grace in his quarrel. [Seen] By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone, though erroneous they may be fine. This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—for the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth.

I have commented already on this passage at some length in *Keats and Shakespeare*. What I wish now to emphasize is the perfect act of self-detachment of which it is the record. The letter, thus far, has been a magnificent revelation of the identity of Beauty and Truth. Keats has been simply describing the Facts of human life as they were present to his contemplation; as Facts, they are bitter and ugly, but, being seen with that same disinterestedness which he prizes and towards which he is striving, they have the perfect Beauty of the Truth.

Then, in a swift crescendo, he himself becomes Fact for his own contemplation, and he looks upon himself in this very moment of his striving towards disinterested contemplation with the same utter disinterestedness. The John Keats whom we love is separated out from the perfect impersonal consciousness of which he was the vehicle. John Keats is 'out there': one with the animal world,—his swift thoughts, his seeing of the Truth which is Beauty, his straining after particles of light in the midst of a great darkness,—all these are reintegrated into the world of animal impulse to which they owe, and wherein they have, their being. Nothing remains on the Subject side but a pure awareness. He is transformed into that Superior Being whom he imagines.

And what he sees, he tries to state in language at the very extreme of compression and pregnancy. He says that this posture of the total human being which he has before his vision, this swiftness of apprehension when the Mind is become an instinct, is the very thing in which Poetry consists. But he himself at this moment is beyond Poetry; Poetry, and John Keats the Poet, are 'out there'. There is therefore a condition beyond Poetry; the condition of that impersonal vision for which Keats the Poet can become the object of Keats the Eye. And this is hard, if not impossible, to express. Keats says it in the words: Poetry 'is not so fine a thing as Philosophy—for the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth.' The expression is not exact; but it seems impossible to make it exact. All we need to recognize is that, no matter by what name we call this condition that is beyond Poetry, Keats was in it then.

Now we do not know whether Keats would have called the actual content of the letter he was writing Poetry or Philosophy. No doubt he believed that the 'reasonings' contained in it were not erroneous, as I believe they were not erroneous. If they were erroneous, provided that they issued from an instinctive attitude of mind, they would still be poetry; if they were not erroneous, they would be—what? Philosophy, we suppose. But if so, this Philosophy would be very different from what generally goes under the name. It would be more nearly akin to the Philosophy which, he once imagined, the nightingale would sing in Elysium,

Where the nightingale doth sing  
Not a senseless, tranced thing,  
But divine melodious truth;  
Philosophic numbers smooth.

And it is of such a Philosophy that he goes on to speak in his letter.

Give me this credit—Do you not think I strive—to know myself? Give me this credit [of knowing myself], and you will not think that on my own account I repeat Milton's lines—

'How charming is divine Philosophy  
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose  
But musical as is Apollo's lute'—

No—no(t) for myself—feeling grateful as I do to have got into a state of mind to relish them properly. Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced—even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it.

It is evident that the Philosophy of which he is speaking—the Philosophy which is beyond Poetry—is that of which he has just had so exciting a glimpse. (His intense excitement is manifest in the haste of his writing.) He suddenly knows what Philosophy is; and he believes that Milton meant the same as he does by Philosophy. And indeed this Philosophy is

Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute.

But not many philosophers have made its acquaintance. This Philosophy is precisely that vision of the universe in which Beauty and Truth are identical.



Wherein does it differ from Poetry itself? If the condition of Poetry, as Keats at this moment of insight declared it to be, is the instinctive posture of the human mind, the posture taken by the mind when it has become once more the faculty of sense which in reality it is, what is the condition of Philosophy? Surely the same, but with one momentous and self-transfiguring addition, that the Poet, to become Philosopher, is now detached even from the total condition of his being, in which mind is reintegrated as a faculty of sense. He is now aware of himself as this total animal; and this animal integrity is the necessary condition of a total detachment from it. The self must be whole, before he can be wholly detached from it. And since the detachment can now be complete, and is complete, it is no longer *he* who is detached. All that the word *he* could ever mean is become the object of a vision which is, necessarily, no longer his own.

Then he is become a Philosopher. In so far as he was a Poet—and a Poet, in Keats' sense, he must have been in order to become the total animal—his errors are no longer errors, but simply happenings. For error is possible, and the conception of error has meaning, only in the realm of animal existence. With that realm of animal existence, the Poet, so long as he is merely Poet, is wholly identified. But that power of vision, by the awakening of which he becomes Philosopher, while it relegates him wholly as Poet to the realm of animal existence (of which he is the perfect type), liberates him wholly from it as pure Spirit, or perfect Consciousness. For pure Spirit, there can be neither error nor truth, just as there can be neither good nor evil, neither beauty nor ugliness; for pure Spirit there is only pure Being—that which is, not merely the fraction of it which also exists. Of the realm of pure Being it may be said, as Keats said, that there Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty; and it may be said *because* in that realm neither truth nor falsehood, beauty nor ugliness can be. The words are metaphors, borrowed necessarily from the realm of animal existence, to which all speech belongs. Therefore whatever words, whether spoken by the tongue of men or angels, might be used to describe the realm of pure Being which the pure Spirit contemplates, must be a paradox, and must moreover be, in the literal sense of the adjective, meaningless.

That realm, which the pure Spirit contemplates, is unutterable; unutterable not because it is hard, or remote, or strange; but because it is simple, and near, and lucid. The child rejoices in it, unknowing; knowledge takes us farther and farther away from it;

we return to it, like prodigal sons to their father's house, with a grave and serious joy, because it is indeed all

We know on earth, and all we need to know.

Of this vision of pure Being only symbolic expression is possible. It is not a world of new objects, but of perfectly familiar things, seen in a new light. If it were a seeing of the physical world, and with the physical eye, we could say that the new light was red or green, or even make a fortune by selling the appropriate spectacles. But in this world, as objects of this vision, are all the thoughts which have ever been thought and all the imaginations which have ever been imagined. True, we cannot see them all, but only an incredibly infinitesimal fraction of them. But their status as possible objects of this vision could not be of another kind than the status of the objects which come before the fraction of the eternal vision that is ours. The strange things would be familiar, even as the familiar things are strange.

And we can imagine, or rather we cannot withhold ourselves from imagining, an Eye to which all that has ever been, and all that will ever be, should be present in the same quiet lucidity—a mind which embraced the totality of Being under the aspect of eternity. Such an imagination has its status with the rest in the realm of pure Being; and is justly evocative of awe and humility. But to ascribe existence to this all-seeing Mind is a strange confusion, a perversion of Philosophy. He who cannot grasp the difference between Being and Existence must never lay claim to the title of Philosopher.

All Existences have their part in the realm of Being, but only a fragment of Being suffers—we know not how—the accident of Existence. But since every existence has its part in the realm of Being, any existence may become a symbol for us of that totality of Being to which it also belongs. So soon as we contemplate any existing thing without desire or regret, without belief or anxiety, without the stirring of any animal impulse towards it, in a pure experience of it as a thing which simply is, we have gained our entrance into the world of Being: the first gleam of that which can become, if we will suffer it, a total vision, is ours. And this is the mighty function of Art; it is the record of many moments in many minds of lucid contemplation, whether of few things or many. By adding one object to the world of existences, it takes away from many that veil of existence which at first prevents them from awakening our vision with the naked and austere loveliness of Being which they possess. Art purifies the world of existence of its

appeal to animal impulse, so that we may retain a possibility of a different vision. When we have undergone the discipline of art and made the vision ours, then Existence can never again become a veil drawn over the face of Being; it no longer conceals pure Being from our view, but becomes an added wonder—a gratuitous and lovely miracle, of which we ourselves, in the completeness of our animal and personal existence and the possible purity of the impersonal vision, which we may strive to achieve until it achieves itself in us, are perfect manifestations.

## VI

### KEATS' USE OF 'SPECULATION'

IN the first edition of *Keats and Shakespeare* there appeared, through my inadvertence, an asterisk which promised a note on Keats' use of the word 'speculation'. The note was written and lost, and I had not time to re-compose it. The following may serve in its place.

I think that Keats almost always used the word 'speculation' either wholly with the meaning which it had in the Elizabethan poets of 'contemplation', or 'simple vision', or with a meaning in which the contemplative element predominates. Possibly, he took the word from the memorable use of it in *Macbeth* (III. iv. 95), which Professor Whitehead in *The Concept of Nature* (p. 6) attributes to Hamlet.

Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with.

It is interesting to note that Professor Whitehead is anxious to re-establish for the purposes of his philosophy the ancient use of the word; for, if I understand his argument rightly, he is returning somewhat cumbrously to the fundamental philosophic simplicity of which Mr. Santayana is the incomparable modern master. This philosophy, or metaphysic, I believe, was always implicit in Keats' thinking; and, as his mind swiftly ripened, it became explicit. One of the main obstacles in the way of its comprehension is his use of words in senses which are not familiar. Perhaps the most important of these words is 'speculation'.

That he used it in his poetry as the equivalent of 'contemplation' is, I think, amply evident from three quotations. One from *I stood tip-toe upon a little hill* (l. 189):

The pillowy silkiness that rests  
Full in the speculation of the stars . . .

The second from *Isabella* (XXIII), where the stanza needs to be quoted entire:

So on a pleasant morning, as he leant  
Into the sun-rise, o'er the balustrade  
Of the garden-terrace, towards him they bent  
Their footing through the dews; and to him said

'You seem there in the quiet of content,  
 Lorenzo, and we are most loth to invade  
 Calm speculation; but if you are wise  
 Bestride your steed while cold is in the skies.'

The third is a cancelled line in the manuscript of *Hyperion* (l. 334). The final text reads:

Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;  
 Actions of rage and passion; even as  
 I see them, on the mortal world beneath,  
 In men who die.

The manuscript originally ran:

even as  
 In widest speculation do I see . . .

In all these instances—and I know of no other uses of the word in Keats' poetry—the meaning of the word is, almost precisely, 'contemplation'. 'Observation' does not fit quite so well. It is the simple act of vision. In all three instances it is physical vision, as in the line from *Macbeth*. There is absolutely no trace of the usual meaning of the word 'speculation' to-day: namely 'cogitation'. To-day we 'speculate about' problems and possibilities; Keats, it is to be noticed in a following passage from his letters, 'speculates on', i.e. 'looks on'. I believe I am right in saying that 'to speculate *about*' occurs nowhere in his writing.

The importance of the distinction is obvious when we consider the famous letter to Woodhouse on the poetical character (27th Oct. 1818), in which the word occurs twice. First:

As to the poetical character itself . . . it is not itself—it has no self—It is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated.—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation.

The inadvertent or unprepared reader of the last sentence, who naturally supposes that 'speculation' is being used here in its modern meaning, misses the real point of it. The final state, Keats says, is a state of 'contemplation', of disinterested beholding of the

dark and the bright side of things. And that is utterly different from speculating about the problem of good and evil.

The word occurs in the same letter a second time:

When I am in a room with people, if ever I am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of everyone in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated.

Here, no doubt, the nuance of meaning inclines a little towards the modern usage; but I am pretty sure that this 'speculation on the creations of his own brain' is a direct sensuous imagination of them—an experience of the kind which he described at about the same time in his letter to his brother and sister:

No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a king's body-guard.

Keeping off, one might say, the pressure of the throng of 'unpleasant identities'. The bias of the word 'speculate' is indeed so strong in Keats that I am inclined to think that his question to Woodhouse: 'Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops?' means rather musing on the actual figures present to his imagination than pondering about their psychology.

The word occurs again in a context equally important for an understanding of Keats' thought, when, on 28th December 1817, he writes to his brothers concerning Benjamin West's picture, 'Death on the Pale Horse':

It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality. The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine *King Lear* and you will find this exemplified throughout: but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation, in which to bury its repulsiveness.

The nuance of the word 'speculation' is of obvious importance here. Keats is not saying that repulsiveness, in a work of the highest art, is buried in the profundity of the thoughts which it arouses; not the depth of what we think *about* the work of art or about its subject-matter is the sign of its excellence, but the depth

of the direct vision which it embodies and which it communicates to us. This 'momentous depth of speculation' is, in fact, a synonym for 'intensity'. And, like 'intensity' it is both in the object and the responsive subject. West's picture lacks 'intensity'; it contains nothing for Keats 'to be intense upon'. Likewise, it manifests no 'momentous depth of speculation' and arouses none.

It would not be easy to decide whether 'speculation' or 'intensity' is the more crucial of these two key-words in Keats' thinking. It is not really possible to define either of them; they have to be studied in their context, and indeed intensely speculated on (not about), before they will yield their secret. Inevitably, they are closely connected with one another, as in the account of West's picture above. Another example is in his letter to Haydon of 10th April 1818.

I have ever been too sensible of the labyrinthian path to eminence in art (judging from Poetry) ever to think I understood the emphasis of painting. The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of beauty. I know not your many havens of intenseness—nor can ever know them; but for [all] this I hope nought you achieve will ever be lost upon me: for when a schoolboy the abstract Idea I had of an heroic painting was what I cannot describe. I saw it somewhat sideways, large, prominent, round and coloured with magnificence—somewhat like the feel I have of *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Or of Alcibiades leaning on his Crimson Couch in his Galley, his broad shoulders heaving imperceptibly with the sea.

The word 'speculation' is not there; only the word 'intenseness'. But that description of the imaginary heroic picture is, I should say, an excellent description of 'the depth of speculation' which Keats found lacking in 'Death and the Pale Horse'. The passage incidentally gives another example of Keats' very personal use of words. Nothing could well be more remote from 'an abstract idea' as ordinarily understood than his imagination of a heroic picture.

To consider these personal uses of words at all fully would demand a small volume. The idiosyncrasy of language, of course, has its roots in the idiosyncrasy of the poet's mind. Abstract thinking, in the ordinary sense, was quite alien to Keats; the movement of his thought was richly imaged, and amazingly concrete—'sensations rather than thoughts'. Hence the recurrence of 'intensity'.

Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed;  
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

These four things, as then experienced by Keats, belong to the order of 'sensations rather than thoughts'. So, to return to our original word, 'speculation' is a sensation rather than a thought. From the same origin proceed nearly all those arresting casual phrases with which his letters are so richly strewn, such as:

We no sooner get . . . into the Chamber of Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this *breathing* is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of *convincing one's nerves* that the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression.

I have italicized the two casual phrases that no one but Keats would have employed: but they are innumerable in his letters. He 'proves things on his pulses'. Thought *was* sensation with Keats—a man of 'more than ordinary organic sensibility', if ever there was one. So far from making him less of a philosopher than those who do not possess his incapacity for abstract thinking, I am convinced it made him a better one. He might have made a poor Platonist; but he was a magnificent materialist, in the full and true meaning of that grossly abused word.



## VII

### THE POET AND THE DREAMER

IN my *Keats and Shakespeare* (pp. 177-9) I discussed at some length the lines in Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion* (ll. 187-210 of the text in Professor de Selincourt's edition of the Poems) which, Woodhouse tells us, 'Keats seems to have intended to erase'. This passage had in fact been excluded previously from the text of the poem by Monckton Milnes, acting, one supposes, on the authority of Woodhouse's statement. On the discovery of the Woodhouse transcript Professor de Selincourt introduced the passage into the text in his fourth edition of the Poems, on the ground that 'it was of the highest importance to the argument of the poem'. To this restoration I took exception on the ground that the added lines falsified the argument of the poem.

In a note to his fifth edition of the Poems (p. 583) Professor de Selincourt appears to dispose of my objection. 'Mr. Murry's argument,' he concludes, 'here as elsewhere, is vitiated by his acceptance of what Keats says when it suits his theory, and rejecting it when Keats has the temerity to differ from him.'

The final statement appears to be irrelevant to the issue. No one is denying that Keats actually said what is contained in the disputed lines. That he wrote them is indubitable. The sole question is whether we should, or should not, give effect to Woodhouse's statement that 'Keats seems to have intended to erase' them. Professor de Selincourt argued, and still argues, that we should not do so. He now says that, whatever may have been the mark Keats put against the lines, 'it is at least as likely to have indicated that the lines needed revision as that they were to be cancelled'. In that statement Professor de Selincourt is already deviating from the authority. Whatever the mark was, Woodhouse interpreted it as meaning that the lines were to be cancelled. Woodhouse is our sole authority for the existence of the mark, and by far the best authority (after Keats himself) for the interpretation of the meaning of any of Keats' marks. It cannot be thus easily reduced to a mark susceptible of any interpretation. We must not start, as Professor de Selincourt does, from the position that what Woodhouse wrote was that 'Keats seems to have intended to *revise* these lines'. He wrote: 'Keats seems to have intended to *erase* them.'

Further, without entering for the moment into the crucial question of Keats' thought, and confining ourselves to the actual text, the striking fact is that the text plainly confirms Woodhouse's statement. Here is the actual passage (included in brackets) with the one introductory line, and the ten succeeding lines:

So answer'd I, continuing, 'If it please, 186  
*(Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all*  
 Those melodies sung into the world's ear  
 Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;  
 A humanist, physician to all men. 190  
 That I am none I feel, as vultures feel  
 They are no birds when eagles are abroad.  
 What am I then: thou spakest of my tribe:  
 What tribe?' *The tall shade veil'd in drooping white*  
*Then spake, so much more earnest, that the breath*  
*Moved the thin linen folds that drooping hung*  
*About a golden censer from the hand*  
*Pendent—*'Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?  
 The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
 Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes. 200  
 The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
 The other vexes it.' Then shouted I  
 Spite of myself, and with a Pythia's spleen,  
 'Apollo! faded! O far-flown Apollo!  
 Where is thy misty pestilence to creep  
 Into the dwellings, through the door-crannies  
 Of all mock-lyrists, large self-worshippers  
 And careless hectorers in proud bad verse?  
 Though I breathe death with them it will be life  
 To see them sprawl before me into graves.) 210  
*Majestic shadow, tell me where I am,*  
 Whose altar this, for whom this incense curls;  
 What Image this whose face I cannot see  
 For the broad marble knees; and who thou art,  
 Of accent feminine, so courteous?'  
*Then the tall shade, in drooping linens veil'd,*  
*Spoke out, so much more earnest, that her breath*  
*Stirr'd the thin folds of gauze that drooping hung*  
*About a golden censer from her hand*  
*Pendent; and by her voice I knew she shed 220*  
 Long-treasured tears . . .

The lines marked in *italic* are repeated, and obviously revised at their second appearance. It is inconceivable to me that Keats intended them to stand together in the text of the poem. That, at least, is certain to me. And it seems to me as near to certainty as we can get in such matters that in ll. 211-20 we have the *actual* 'revision' of ll. 187-210. Professor de Selincourt has asked, 'May not Keats have intended to revise, and not to erase, ll. 187-210?' But if, as seems manifest to me, ll. 211-20 are themselves the revised form of ll. 187-210, his question becomes meaningless. Keats *had* revised them; and in consequence of this revision it was inevitable that he should have intended to erase ll. 187-210. I should, myself, have been forced to that conclusion if no such statement of Woodhouse's were in existence. Moreover, I believe that, if ll. 187-210 had been in the accepted text, before the discovery of the Woodhouse transcript, they would have been challenged long ago. Be that as it may, the evidence of the text itself is striking; and it fully corroborates Woodhouse's statement that Keats 'seems to have intended to erase' ll. 187-210.

When these matters—which I took for granted in *Keats and Shakespeare*—have been made plain, it is seen that the *prima facie* case against the introduction of the lines into the text is far stronger than Professor de Selincourt allows. To overcome this *prima facie* case against the lines, Professor de Selincourt has to prove that the lines are, indeed, of *vital* importance to the argument of *The Fall of Hyperion*. It is not true to say, as he does, that 'to prove his main contention Mr. Murry would have to prove either that Keats never wrote the lines at all, or that he wrote them at some considerably earlier period'. My main contention is that the lines are (i) not of vital importance to the argument of the poem and (ii) that, in fact, they conflict with the real argument of the poem. My contention is indeed quite simple: namely, that Keats, when he wrote those lines, was saying something which he did not really intend to say, and that he pulled himself up and began again at the point where he was conscious that he had 'gone off the rails'. That, I submit, is a perfectly natural happening, and one familiar to the experience of writers far less eminent than Keats. To say that, in order to 'prove' that this happened, I must 'prove' either that Keats never wrote the abandoned lines at all, or that he wrote them a long while before he abandoned them, is quite unwarrantable. It contradicts psychological probability and common-sense.

All that I really have to prove is that the lines are not of *vital* importance to the poem; for this is enough to establish the case

against the re-introduction of the lines into the text. That I was involved in the effort to show more than this in pp. 177-9 of *Keats and Shakespeare* was due to the fact that I was primarily concerned with the interpretation of the poem. There I wrote:

The argument by which their inclusion in the text is justified is that the thought is necessary. Without these lines, it is said, there is no answer to the great question put to Keats: 'What benefit canst thou or all thy tribe Do the great world?' The question will go by default and poetry be rejected as useless. The situation is supposed to be saved by those lines wherein Keats admits that he is a dreamer, and of the tribe of dreamers—whereas the true poet is in this sense no dreamer at all. Keats deleted the lines. The reason of his doing so is quite clear.

He did not admit that he was a mere dreamer; he knew—had he not spent those last bitter months, and all his poetic life, in learning it?—the difference between a poet and a mere dreamer. Did he not know that he was a true poet? Was he not proving it at the very moment that he wrote? The first great reason why Keats cancelled the lines and why they must remain cancelled is that they were not true of himself. There was no time and no place for false modesty. To restore those lines is to do him and his thought an injury, in the interests of an apparent logic which he himself rejected. (p. 178.)

'Why,' Professor de Selincourt asks, 'if these lines were cancelled because Keats did not admit he was a mere dreamer, did he not also cancel ll. 168-9, where Moneta charges him with being a dreamer?' This 'logic' is irrelevant. The whole point is that Keats is now the dreamer, and something besides. And what that something besides is, is indefinable; it can only be suggested, as it is suggested precisely at this point of the poem, where Moneta declares to him:

Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shar'd,  
Such things as thou art are admitted oft  
Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,  
And suffer'd in these Temples: for that cause  
Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees.

Keats has endured a vital change. The essential nature of the change has been already declared.

Thou hast felt  
What 'tis to die and live again before  
Thy fated hour; that thou hadst power to do so  
Is thy own safety.

By this power Keats is differentiated from the mere dreamer. The mere dreamer 'rots on the pavement where he rotted half'. But Keats is saved, by an agony of suffering indeed, but saved.

It is surely obvious that the simple dichotomy between the mere poet-dreamer and the true poet has no application to this condition achieved by Keats. The hasty words which he gave to Moneta:

The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.—

are irrelevant to Keats' new condition. What that condition is cannot be expressed in those terms.

Professor de Selincourt now writes:

But 'had he not utterly rejected dreams?' asks Mr. Murry. The answer is that he had not rejected them *before*, but that he represents himself *now* as learning from Moneta to reject them. It stands to reason that the judgement passed by Moneta, and endorsed by himself, refers to the poetry he had already written and not to the poem he is now writing, in which he expounds the truth Moneta has taught him; a truth which was to guide his future work. Here, then, he is not the 'dreamer', but the poet from whom the dreamer is 'distinct'.

That argument is, in the main, sound: except for the crucial point that the new truth is not merely to guide Keats' future poems, but is actually guiding this one. But, unfortunately, the lines which Professor de Selincourt still hopes to rescue by this argument end with the invocation to Apollo:

Where is thy misty pestilence to creep  
Into the dwellings, through the door-crannies  
Of all mock-lyrists, large self-worshippers,  
And careless hectorers in proud bad verse?  
*Though I breathe death with them it will be life*  
*To see them sprawl before me into graves.*

Here, plainly, Keats counts himself as himself involved in the destruction of the 'dreamer-tribe'. To use his former figure, he is now condemned 'to rot on the pavement where he rotted half'. The inward contradiction is plain. How can such lines be saved by an argument which admits that Keats is no longer a 'dreamer'? This argument is merely a new form of my original argument for the rejection of the lines.

I submit that, first, Professor de Selincourt has failed to prove what he must prove, namely, that the lines are vitally necessary to the argument of the poem; and, second, I submit that the argument of the poem, as he now interprets it, is in complete conflict with the plain meaning of the conclusion, at least, of the lines which he still desires, in spite of Woodhouse's statement, and the textual evidence of the lines themselves, to re-introduce into the body of the poem. I see no reason at all to alter my former conclusion:

The passage which has been unwarrantably restored to the text not only makes Keats do an injustice to himself which he refused to do, but instead of making clear the real nature of his thought, it confuses it. The clarity it adds is merely superficial; therefore Keats rejected it.

Whether or not Professor de Selincourt agrees with the main thesis of my *Keats and Shakespeare* is not in issue at all. This particular problem must be considered, and must be settled, on its own merits. Professor de Selincourt took the step of introducing the passage into the text of the poem; a valid defence of his action is still required.

There is a thread in the argument of *The Fall of Hyperion*, very relevant to this controversy, which emerges at other crucial moments in Keats' thinking, and seems to puzzle other critics of Keats.

When the poet, after his death in life, reaches the altar-steps, he is told by Moneta that his title to this escape from death is (i) that he had power to endure a death in life, and (ii) that he was one of

those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest.

But are there not (the poet asks Moneta) thousands of these? Why, then, is he alone on the altar-steps? Moneta replies that it is because the others are content to labour for the immediate good of their fellow-men. He is here, because he is 'less than they'.

How he is less, she explains. He is 'a dreaming thing, a fever of himself'. Whereas they are not.

Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,  
*Whether his labours be sublime or low—*  
The pain alone; the joy alone; distinct:  
Only the dreamer venoms all his days,  
Bearing more woes than all his sins deserve.

A new distinction is here introduced; what logicians call a cross-

division. The first division was between unimaginative men and the imaginative, 'those to whom the miseries of the world are misery'. In this division Keats belongs to the imaginative men. But the imaginative men are divided into those like Keats, who dream, and those who act for immediate human good. These latter imaginative men are one with the common, unimaginative men, in that they both—'whether their labours be sublime' (the imaginative active man) 'or low' (the unimaginative active man)—experience their pain and their joy distinct. Only the dreamer (the imaginative, inactive man) venoms *all* his days. For that reason such as he are admitted often into the garden, and into the temple, where they rot, unless they have the power 'to die and live again before their fated hour'.

The thought is compressed and pregnant but, it seems to me, perfectly clear. The further superimposed division of the dreamers (the imaginative inactive men) into poets and dreamers (which, as I argue, Keats rejected for this very reason) confuses everything. In his abandoned lines Keats suggests that there is a distinction between the imaginative inactive man who does not act for immediate human good, but does good by his poetry (the Poet *par excellence*) and the imaginative poet like himself who does no good by his poetry (the Dreamer). Moneta drives home the distinction.

The Poet and the Dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.

Does such a Poet *par excellence* really exist? Keats very wisely doubted it, marked the lines for deletion and made a fresh start.

This idiosyncrasy of the imaginative inactive man, by which his joy and pain are not distinct, but intermingled, appears to derive from the centre of Keats' experiencing nature. He recurs to it in *Lamia* (ll. 191-6), where the Lamia is said to be

Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain  
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain,  
Define their pettish limits, and estrange  
Their points of contact and swift counterchange:  
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart  
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art.

These lines are dismissed by Mr. Ridley in his book, *Keats' Craftsmanship*, as 'six lines which have a specious appearance of

reflective profundity and in fact mean as nearly as may be exactly nothing' (p. 255). On the contrary, though they are poor poetry, they mean a great deal. They mean, like the lines from *The Fall of Hyperion* with which they are intimately connected, that the condition in which joy and pain are distinct was for Keats a condition of beatitude from which he was debarred. He was condemned to look before and after, and in the extremity of his consciousness and his imaginative sympathy to know neither joy nor pain unalloyed. There are moments when he can regard this as a privilege, and the tense inward struggle from which *The Fall of Hyperion* derives its stern and sombre life is precisely the poet's effort to win the assurance that it is a privilege. The point of the lines as applied to the Lamia is that she, ostensibly in virtue of her praeternatural origin, is born with the power to conquer this equivocal condition of the conscious poet; she can

Intrigue with the specious chaos and dispart  
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art.

This is her essential difference, of which her physical metamorphosis is merely the outward sign. This is what sets the Lamia apart from a mortal like Lycius, or like Keats.

In this respect the Lamia is intimately related to the 'ravished nymph' who appears in the first draft of the final lines of *Hyperion*, which as reconstituted by Mr. Ridley runs thus:

Thus the God,  
While his enkindled eyes, with level glance  
Beneath his white soft temples, stedfast kept  
Trembling with light upon Mnemosyne:  
Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush  
All the immortal fairness of his limbs,  
*Into a hue more roseate than sweet pain*  
*Gives to a ravish'd Nymph when her warm tears*  
*Gush luscious with no sob. Or more severe;—*  
More like the struggle at the gate of death;  
Or liker still to one who should take leave  
Of pale immortal death, and with a pang  
As hot, as death's is chill, with fierce convulse  
Die into life. So young Apollo anguish'd.

Keats told Woodhouse that the whole passage describing the inward metamorphosis of Apollo (*Hyperion*, Bk. III, ll. 79 to the end) 'seemed to come to him by chance or magic—to be as it were something given to him'. It is well that he deleted the three



lines; but they are much more than 'a disastrous spasm of the old fatal Leigh Hunt influence', as Mr. Ridley describes them (*op. cit.*, p. 93). The image, however shocking to our taste, was meant seriously. What Keats was struggling to convey by the concrete imagery characteristic of his poetic method, was the mystery of 'dying into life'; and whether or not we like the idea that the climax of this inward metamorphosis should be compared to the moment at which the pain of a ravished girl passes into pleasure—the moment at which the maid, by the rude touch of the enforcer, becomes a woman—there is no doubt that at a deeper level than that of conventional propriety the image is as profound as it is bold.

The Lamia is the counterpart and opposite of this 'ravish'd nymph'. Love, for the Lamia, means no such 'swift counterchange' of bliss and pain; and because it does not, she is not mortal. Every word she speaks entices Lycius on 'to *unperplex'd* delight and pleasure known' (l. 327). Therefore she is, in the deepest sense of the word, an illusion and the cause of illusion. She neither knows perplexity in herself nor causes it in her lover; whereas this perplexity is inherent in conscious humanity, and the 'ravish'd nymph' is an extreme physical symbol of it.

Through his acceptance of, and submission to, this perplexity of joy and pain, the poet endures his 'death in life', which is, as it were, the supreme experience of that perplexity—its complete and final embodiment in 'sensation'. This perplexity is at the very heart of the *Odes*, and receives perhaps its most triumphant poetical assertion in the final lines of the *Ode to Melancholy*.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips

Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,

Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight

Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,

Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue

Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;

His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,

And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

The beauty in truth, the truth in beauty of that, is the proof that Keats was right in rejecting the suggestion of his doubtful mind that the Poet and the Dreamer are distinct: 'the one pours out a balm upon the world, the other vexes it'. The great poet vexes the world, and himself; but in his vexation is the balm.

## VIII

### KEATS AND MILTON

IN his book, *The Miltonic Setting*, Mr. E. M. Tillyard attributes to my book *Keats and Shakespeare* a considerable influence in the critical depreciation of Milton which has, undoubtedly, been going on during the last twenty years. This critical depreciation Mr. Tillyard regards as excessive and unwarrantable, as perhaps it is; and in order to correct it, he criticizes my book.

But here are involved two critical issues which need to be kept distinct. One is: the right estimate of Milton, intrinsically, as a poet. The other is: the right estimate of the role he played in Keats' experience at a crucial moment. For the first, I admit without demur that I, for reasons of idiosyncrasy, am inclined to under-estimate Milton's intrinsic value as a poet. For the second, I maintain that my estimate of the role he played in Keats' experience in 1819 is correct. And it seems to me that Mr. Tillyard tends to confuse these distinct issues. Since it is important that the doing of justice to Milton should not involve the confusion of the clear picture I tried to trace of Milton's significance *for* Keats, at a particular moment of Keats' life, I wish to rebut some of Mr. Tillyard's criticisms of that picture.

The most interesting of these is that, so far from the Miltonic style being inadequate to Keats' experience, Milton himself, some time before writing *Lycidas*, underwent much the same kind of experience as Keats had undergone in the early months of 1819, and that the thought and feeling of *Lycidas* is closely akin to that of the *Ode to a Nightingale*. Unfortunately, this is a matter which hardly lends itself to expression in argument. I can do little more than say that the feeling-tone of the two poems is to my sense altogether different. I can, indeed, bring forward good reasons, from Keats' biography, why the feeling-tone of the two poems, and the 'depth of speculation' aroused by them is so different; but if Mr. Tillyard does not feel this difference, there is no common ground between us. 'Mr. Murry', he says, 'really must not be allowed to confine the great generalities of human feeling to the kind of man he happens to prefer; and if Keats' problem and its solution grew out of "the torment of experience", so did Milton's.'

Mr. Tillyard's phrase, 'the great generalities of human feeling', conceals the rather deep gulf that divides us. For precisely what

I was concerned to elucidate in Keats was a great particularity of feeling. To Milton the phrase, 'the great generalities of human feeling', seems to me apt, in the main; but hardly at all to Keats. It is the marvel of Keats, in my experience of him, that his peculiar genius conveys—sometimes with an almost intolerable intensity—the actual sensation, the private and particular quality, of his deep feeling. It is no part of my contention that Milton did not feel deeply, too: I believe he did, but in other ways, and about a different kind of things. I should say that Milton's feeling, at its deepest, was of a quality entirely different from Keats'.

The existence and the reality of such differences, elemental and wellnigh absolute, between the quality of feeling in different men is with difficulty recognized in literary criticism, because these differences are so extremely hard to formulate. Yet, I believe, they are of major importance. I would even say that to them are due most of the great divergences in the history of the human mind, and that no approximately true history of the human race can be written without a realization of their existence and an appreciation of their significance. Maine de Biran did not exaggerate at all when he wrote in his *Mémoire sur les perceptions obscures*:

Each individual is distinguished from another of the species by the fundamental manner in which he feels his life, and consequently in which he feels—I do not say judges—his relations to other things, in so far as they can favour or menace his existence. The difference in this respect is perhaps stronger even than that which exists between people's features or the external formation of their bodies.

Nevertheless, though I believe that every individual has his own way of 'feeling his life', I also believe that men of imaginative genius could be classed into feeling-types. Spenser and Milton and Dr. Bridges, for example, belong to the same broad feeling-type; Shakespeare and Keats belong to the same feeling-type. These two classes are not exhaustive. I do not consider that Wordsworth, for example, can be fairly placed in either of these classes. Dr. Jung in his suggestive book, *Psychological Types*, has boldly, but perhaps prematurely, attempted a detailed classification. But he has, at least, conclusively established that 'scientific' psychology—in the peculiar modern sense of reductive psychology—is useless in this realm; by its assumptions it abolishes the very phenomena to be studied.

Probably several major antitheses of 'feeling-types' would have to be established, and a great deal of cross-division endured, if a comprehensive classification were to be made. My private conviction is that Blake's Prophetic Books contain a wealth of precious indications for this purpose. But, no doubt, the history of religion, and pre-eminently the history of the Christian religion (of which Blake's Prophetic Books are an integral and neglected part), supplies us with the finest instrument for this investigation. The great distinction, as it has manifested itself in history, between the catholic and the protestant mind, roughly corresponds (I am convinced) to one of these elemental antitheses of feeling-type. I use the words for my particular purpose without capitals, because Roman Catholicism has contained many protestant minds (e.g. Pascal and Port-Royal), and Protestantism many catholic minds. In so far as Anglicanism can be called Protestant, it is predominantly catholic. And obviously, previous to the Reformation, protestant and catholic minds lived together in the Western Church without intolerable friction.

Using these terms then in a general rather than a precisely religious sense, I should say that Shakespeare and Keats were of the catholic feeling-type and Milton was of the protestant feeling-type; and that they were very pure examples of their type. In my book, *Heaven and Earth*, I examine in detail the fundamental feeling pattern of Milton, and I contrast him successively with Blake and Keats, and finally with Cromwell, in whose composition were some very potent catholic elements. If I am required to describe the catholic type, at a high level, I should say it is much more conscious than the protestant type of the mystery of existence, and in particular of the mystery of suffering; and much more conscious of the limitations of the human reason. This, I should say, derived from a different quality of primary experience, which comes to the catholic nature immediate, warm, and perplexing.

The difference emerges fairly clearly in a dual attitude towards the central Christian mystery. The protestant type of mind lays more stress on the Atonement, the catholic on the Incarnation; the catholic mind is naturally sacramental, the protestant naturally exegetic. At this point, if not before, the significance of the distinction for poetry is manifest. I should say that Keats' poetry is sacramental, and Milton's is not. Keats' poetry is charged with warmth and mystery, like a pulse in the blood, while Milton's is not. Keats was not a professed Christian, while Milton was; yet

Keats, I should say, was much more a naturally Christian poet than Milton.

To elaborate the distinction would take me too far. But I should like to suggest that it underlies the constant effort of the catholic mind, manifest in catholic theology, to vindicate the whole conception of 'the naturally Christian' nature of human existence. For the catholic mind, which is nourished by the catholic feeling-nature, divine Grace is a consummation and perfection of the natural order. For the protestant mind, on the contrary, the natural order is hopelessly corrupt and depraved, and divine Grace is an irruption of the totally other supernatural order into the evil of unredeemed existence. The natural is essentially diabolical.

It would be fantastic to charge Milton with this Lutheran extravagance. On the contrary, his apparent peculiarity is that he is overweeningly confident in the natural man, or at least in the natural reason of man. But it would not be difficult to show how this excessive confidence in human reason derived from a secularized Protestantism, in which the religious sense of human depravity produces its own antithesis in a conviction of secular 'election'. Milton was convinced of his 'election' at a curiously early age—an age at which it is psychologically impossible to believe that he had undergone the very intense spiritual struggle which distinguishes the religious Protestant, and of which Cromwell is so striking an example. Milton's sense of 'election' appears to have been entirely precocious and unnatural (from the *religious* point of view); and it issued in a truly astonishing confidence in human reason, and primarily in his own reason, completely emancipated from the humility of religious faith.

I cannot conceive Keats at any moment of his career thinking of himself as 'a great man' with anything approaching Milton's self-confidence. At his highest pitch of confidence Keats hoped to be '*among* the English poets' at his death. Milton never gives me the impression of wanting to be *among* anybody; Mr. Tillyard's notion that, because Milton's doctrines were Protestant, were he living to-day, he might need to be 'saved from the Groups' is *very* odd—and as for asking to have it inscribed upon his tombstone that here lay one whose name was writ in water—it is, in Milton's case, just unimaginable. Milton was naturally full of his rather magnificent Self, Keats was naturally self-less.

I can see no essential likeness at all between *Lycidas* and *The Ode to a Nightingale*. I think *Lycidas* a very beautiful poem; but I find in it little trace of suffering, and less sense of the mystery of

suffering. In it Milton uses the Christian soteriology as a theme for his austere and beautiful poetic pattern. I am none too sure that he felt the loss of Edward King very bitterly; and I feel certain that as a personal pain it was not comparable with what Keats felt on the death of Tom Keats. Mr. Tillyard's theory that *Lycidas* is the outcome of 'the torment of experience' is incomprehensible to me. For the analogue, in life-experience, in Milton of that which utters itself in Keats' *Odes* we should have to go to a much later period in Milton's life. *Lycidas* is a poem of the intellectual imagination, conceived in the great Renaissance-pastoral tradition: it is, to my sense, perhaps the most magnificent 'exercise' ever written. I should not even care to deny that it was one of the very loveliest poems in the English language. But it is not the poem of one who has been oppressed by 'the burden of the mystery'.

The types of feeling and thinking represented by Milton and Keats are generically different. And I should say it was precisely because they were so different that Keats was able to learn, as he did, so much as a poet from Milton. His absorption of Milton's art was undisturbed by any deep affinity of feeling. In this particular and important sense he *learned* far less from Shakespeare and Wordsworth than he learned from Spenser and Milton. Milton, as a thinking and feeling human being, was not near to Keats; and he could learn from him as from a schoolmaster.

But there came a moment in Keats' life when he was tempted to learn more from Milton than his poetic art; when, by the exigencies of his own destiny, he was compelled to adopt, if by any means he might, what he felt to be the Miltonic attitude. I gave a careful account of this moment in *Keats and Shakespeare*. Mr. Tillyard misrepresents this account, no doubt inadvertently, in very important particulars. Thus he says that I represent that Keats' Miltonic period, when he was writing the first *Hyperion*, was 'artificial and inorganic'. I do nothing of the kind. My contention is entirely different: it is that Keats' creative adaptation of the Miltonic style was perfectly natural and perfectly adequate, while he was writing the greater part of the first *Hyperion*, but that there came a moment when his being was convulsed by deeper experiences than any he had hitherto known, and that *thenceforward* his adaptation of the Miltonic style was not natural or adequate to him: thenceforward, the influence of Milton was something which he had deliberately, by an effort of will, to impose upon

himself. That attempt to impose the constraint of the Miltonic style upon his changed being was finally intolerable. He had to break free from it, or 'die'. 'Life to him would be death to me.'

Surely, there is a very great difference between this contention and that which Mr. Tillyard imputes to me. I feel that he has not understood my argument at all, although I expounded it patiently enough. For example, in order to prove that Milton did not have the peculiar significance for Keats which I assign to him (at the moment of rewriting *Hyperion*) Mr. Tillyard quotes Keats' letter of 15th August 1819: 'Shakespeare and Paradise Lost every day become greater wonders to me. I look upon fine phrases like a lover.' That shows, he says, that Keats looked upon Shakespeare equally with Milton as a master of 'the verse of art'. If the letter existed in isolation, it would show this. But it does not exist in isolation. It is rapidly followed by others, which Mr. Tillyard forbears to mention. The sequence of these letters I carefully give on pp. 164-6 of *Keats and Shakespeare*: they culminate in the letter to Reynolds of 25th August 1819.

All my thoughts and feelings which are of the selfish nature, home speculations every day continue to make me more Iron. I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is next to fine doing, the top thing in the world, the Paradise Lost becomes a greater wonder. The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect; the more does my heart distend with Pride and Obstinacy—I feel it in my power to become a popular Writer—I feel it in my strength to refuse the poisonous suffrage of a public. My own being which I know to be becomes of more consequence to me than the crowds of Shadows in the shape of men and women that inhabit a Kingdom. The soul is a world of itself, and has enough to do in its own home. Those whom I know already, and who have grown as it were a part of myself, I could not do without: but for the rest of mankind, they are as much a dream to me as Milton's Hierarchies. I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organization of heart, and lungs as strong as an ox's so as to be able (to bear) unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my life very nearly alone though it should last eighty years.

In my comment on this letter in *Keats and Shakespeare*, I assert that the disappearance of Shakespeare from the sentence: 'Shakespeare and the Paradise Lost every day become greater wonders to me' is of crucial significance.

What is happening is clear. Keats knows he cannot invoke Shakespeare any more, being what he is become. He has shut Fanny Brawne, he has shut the world of men and women out of his heart; and with them he has shut out Shakespeare . . . Shakespeare had endured a bitter love; Shakespeare had accepted the world of men and women; Shakespeare had made his terms with the public; and in these things Shakespeare had shown his greatness. Keats could not follow him. . . . He was trying desperately to make the remoteness and abstraction of Milton his ideal; to find in the deliberate art of Milton and his proud neglect of human destinies for his majestic but inhuman theological drama a refuge from the torment of life.

I find nothing to change in this: I believe that it is true. Obviously, it is not and was not intended as a judgement of Milton, except in so far as it declares that the theological drama of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is 'inhuman'. I believe it is inhuman, not because it is theological, but because its theology is inhuman. That is a matter of opinion. I am prepared to defend mine. 'Un-Christian' is an ugly word to bandy about; but I am even prepared to maintain that Milton's epic is essentially un-Christian.

What I did not notice at the time I wrote *Keats and Shakespeare* was the interesting fact that in this letter Keats half-consciously identifies himself not merely with Milton, the self-sufficient artist, but with Milton's Satan. 'The more I know what my diligence may in time probably effect, the more does my heart distend with Pride and Obstinacy.' The phrase comes from *Paradise Lost*, Book I, ll. 571-2, where Satan reviews his host.

And now his heart  
Distends with pride, and hardning in his strength  
Glories.

Keats' use of the phrase incidentally affords some corroboration of Blake's memorable identification of Satan with Milton, who was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it'. The influence of the Miltonic Satan on all Blake's subsequent thinking and feeling was profound. He became for Blake the symbol of human pride and self-sufficiency—the eternal opponent of the Divine-Humanity, which was Jesus, who took possession of the human heart only when it had acknowledged that 'we, in our Selves, are nothing'.

Of this spiritual and religious order was the conflict that tormented Keats in August and September 1819. It was a struggle



between the impulse to pride and self-sufficiency, with Milton for the ideal, and submission and humility, with Shakespeare for the ideal. Keats' rejection of Milton implied, of course, a profound criticism of Milton as a spiritual being (which I believe to be just); but it likewise implied a tremendously high estimate of Milton as 'a man of Character' (which I likewise believe to be just).

He above the rest  
In shape and gesture proudly eminent  
Stood like a Tower; his form had yet not lost  
All her Original brightness, nor appear'd  
Less than Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess  
Of Glory obscur'd.

But Keats, indubitably, did pass judgement on Milton; or rather the Divine Humanity in Keats passed judgement on him then—precisely the same judgement that is passed on him in Blake's *Milton*. With that judgement I humbly agree.

Mr. Tillyard does well to defend Milton; but I think he does ill to misrepresent, as he does, the nature of Keats' judgement on Milton. Keats' rejection of Milton, like Blake's, really does Milton more honour than Mr. Tillyard's defence of him. He was for Keats the *nec plus ultra* of spiritual and poetic self-sufficiency. I believe that this attitude, if persisted in to the bitter end, as Milton persisted in it, has deplorable results, which are manifest to me in *Samson Agonistes*; but that it is an heroic attitude is undeniable. Nevertheless, *Samson Agonistes* seems to me, by its very perfection in its own kind, a lamentable end to the work of a great poetic genius. It is Christianity without Christ; the Old Testament without the Prophets.

*Samson* hath quit himself  
Like *Samson*, and heroically hath finish'd  
A life Heroic, on his Enemies  
Fully reveng'd, hath left them years of mourning,  
And lamentation to the Sons of *Caphtor*  
Through all *Philistian* bounds.

Satan hath quit himself like Satan; Milton like Milton. It is tremendous, and it is terrible. I can only echo Keats' words: 'Life to him would be death to me.'

It seems to me that Mr. Tillyard does not appreciate the real issue. He tends, moreover, to 'take everything literally'—and

more than literally. Because I say that *The Ode to Autumn* is Shakespearian (as it surely is) I am represented as 'having seen in the *Ode to Autumn*, as individual a poem as Keats ever wrote, a re-embodiment of the soul of Shakespeare', which is 'fantastic'. It may be; but I did not see, or say, it. I do not think it accords with the principles of responsible criticism thus to misrepresent those with whom one disagrees. Moreover, to assert that because the *Ode to Autumn* is a magnificently individual poem, it cannot be 'Shakespearian' in the sense in which I used that word, is absurd.

I am accused of substituting Shakespeare for Chatterton at a crucial point in my argument. Keats wrote:

I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in English Words. I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse can not be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up.

(*To Reynolds*: 21st Sept. 1819)

And on the same day, at more or less the same moment, he wrote in his journal-letter to America:

I shall never become attach'd to a foreign idiom so as to put it into my writings. The *Paradise lost* though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production in the world. A northern dialect accommodating itself to greek and latin inversions and intonations. The purest english I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's. The Language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's language is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art—I wish to devote myself to another sensation.

How can I—Mr. Tillyard asks in effect—represent the outcome of the Milton-Shakespeare struggle in Keats as a victory for Shakespeare, when Keats himself makes plain that it is a victory for Chatterton? In order to suit the exigencies of my extravagant thesis, I brazenly substitute Shakespeare for Chatterton.

To which I must reply that, if Mr. Tillyard is content 'to take everything literally', I am guilty of a bare-faced (though open and avowed) substitution. But my theme is not, as Mr. Tillyard seems to imagine, the conflicting influence of the poetic 'objectivities'—John Milton and William Shakespeare—on the being of John Keats, but the conflicting influence of two types of 'poetic character' upon him. These two conflicting types of 'poetic character' were symbolized, for Keats, chiefly in Milton and Shakespeare—but not exclusively. The Shakespearian type was represented to him also by Chatterton, whose high place in Keats' imaginative hierarchy is precisely given in his original dedication to *Endymion*, wherein he dedicates his poem, reverentially, 'to the memory of the most English of poets except Shakespeare, Thomas Chatterton'. It is no concern of mine to judge whether Keats was in error, or how far in error, in thus estimating a poet who has fallen from esteem; I am merely concerned to establish the significance of Chatterton *for* Keats. That, I think, is plain. For Keats, Shakespeare is at once the greatest and 'most English' of our poets. Chatterton is the next *in order of Englishness*, for him. Certainly not the next in order of poetic greatness. At least four were greater than Chatterton—Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Wordsworth—and probably there were at least a dozen others between Shakespeare and Chatterton in the order of poetic greatness. But, at this particular moment, and from this particular angle, Keats is concerned with 'Englishness'. He is seeking to make articulate, on the linguistic side, his revulsion from Milton.

Milton's verse idiom is for Keats, at this moment, 'a foreign idiom'. He includes in this notion of Milton's 'foreign idiom' both his actual diction, and his rhythms. And he sets over against it, not as intrinsically superior, but as more congenial to himself, Chatterton's idiom, in the same twofold sense. Chatterton's idiom is an English idiom—the next most English after Shakespeare's. Since Keats' deliberate conclusion, in this technical province or aspect of his revulsion from Milton's influence, is that 'English ought to be kept up', Chatterton takes on an importance that may not be intrinsically his. He is, if I may so express it, the representative in the technical province, of the type of poetic character which Keats imputed pre-eminently to Shakespeare.

But Shakespeare, as a type of poetic character, included many things which were not, or were only faintly adumbrated, in Chatterton. He stood supremely for Negative Capability, for the capacity of 'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any

irritable reaching after fact and reason'. These other more inward and spiritual qualities of Shakespeare, as a type of 'poetic character', were irrelevant to Keats' immediate point. He is talking in terms of technical influences and giving a technical reason why he found it impossible to continue his task of recasting *Hyperion*. It would have been excessive and presumptuous—in one who estimated Shakespeare so highly as Keats did—to write to Reynolds or George: 'I have decided to cease following Milton's idiom, I prefer to follow Shakespeare's.' He said, with an altogether characteristic modesty, 'I will follow Chatterton's'. I do not believe that I am mistaken in this interpretation of the actual process of Keats' mind at this moment. But if it still appears to Mr. Tillyard that I have done no more than commit a brazen and high-handed piece of legerdemain, I shall be sorry, but I shall be impenitent.

There were many reasons why Keats found it impossible to get on with *Hyperion* in the early months of 1819; but I do not think that conscious aversion to the Miltonic style was one of them. His incapacity, as I tried to show, was due to an influx of new and undigested experience. There were, again, many reasons why he found it impossible in August and September 1819 to continue with his attempt to recast *Hyperion* into the *Fall of Hyperion*. It was only then that he felt a conscious aversion to the Miltonic style, which he expressed in his letters of 21st September 1819. But (as Dr. Bridges pointed out long ago) it is remarkable that *The Fall of Hyperion*—that is to say, the lines which Keats now added to the original *Hyperion*—is very much less Miltonic than the original *Hyperion*. What, to take an example quite at hazard, is there Miltonic about these lines?

A long awful time

I look'd upon them; still they were the same;  
The frozen God still bending to the earth  
And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet,  
Moneta silent. Without stay or prop  
But my own weak mortality, I bore  
The load of this eternal quietude,  
The unchanging gloom and the three fixed shapes  
Ponderous upon my senses a whole moon;  
For by my burning brain I measured sure  
Her silver seasons shedded on the night,  
And every day by day methought I grew

More gaunt and ghostly—Oftentimes I prayed  
 Intense, that Death would take me from the vale  
 And all its burthens—gasping with despair  
 Of change, hour after hour I cursed myself . . .

It is a very powerful kind of verse on which very possibly Cary's Dante had some influence; but it is certainly not Miltonic. It was therefore (as I conjecture) less directly in reference to the verse he was actually writing than in reference to that which he was re-reading in the hope of revising, that he uttered his judgement of Milton's style. He could not continue in the style of the original *Hyperion*, now: he would be adding patches of new cloth to an old garment.

Behind this technical incompatibility, as I tried to show, was another and tremendous influx of new experience. But Keats' attitude to Milton was complex and equivocal. Actually, he was not writing Miltonic blank verse (if we apply that name to the verse of the first *Hyperion*) but a very powerful blank verse of his own, at the time when in August 1819 he was identifying himself with Milton. It was Milton's spiritual attitude—the attitude of Milton's Satan—that he was trying to enforce upon himself. He was trying to achieve, at the cost of immense inward suffering, an attitude of detachment from 'the miseries of the world'. He was trying to control his pain, subdue his heart, and to write an 'epic'. And Milton was the symbol of all that effort. Milton was, indubitably, a man who made great efforts; but I do not believe he ever made an effort of this kind. Milton seems to have had no difficulty at all in thrusting his love out of his heart. So that Milton was not really an adequate symbol of the effort Keats was making; and on the other hand, by thus elevating Milton to an ideal role which he was not fitted to fill, Keats ran the risk, when the inevitable reaction came, of doing Milton some injustice. I think, for example, it was unjust to Milton to prefer Chatterton's 'native music' to his. But that injustice will disturb us only if we try to read Keats' sentiments about Milton as grave and *ex cathedra* critical pronouncements. They are not that; but neither are they petulant and negligible. They afford us a precious glimpse of what was happening to Keats; and if they are not pressed too far, an equally precious indication of what Keats had come to feel about Milton.

If we insist on knowing what Keats *meant* by saying that he preferred to follow Chatterton's idiom rather than Milton's, what

he *meant* by saying that 'English ought to be kept up', what he *meant* by the significantly repeated phrase: 'I wish to give myself up to other sensations' . . . 'I wish to devote myself to another sensation'—we have one concrete piece of evidence: the *Ode to Autumn*. It is a much more adequate answer to those questions than any abstract theorizing could possibly give. We can, in a measure, understand what Keats meant by those three intentions from the *Ode*; and reciprocally, we can understand the *Ode* better by those three intentions.

Keats had returned, not deliberately, but by a necessity of his own being, to his axiom of poetry: that 'if it come not naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all'. That is not an axiom for all poets, but for a particular type of the poetic character, of which, for Keats, Shakespeare was the supreme example. It involved a rejection, not so much of artifice in itself, but of all artifice that could not be absorbed into a second nature: of all artifice that was felt to be a constriction on the creative genius of the poet, and on the creative genius of the English language. Of this dual constriction, in the last resort, the poet's 'sensation' was the sole and authoritative criterion. Hence Keats' emphasis on the word at this moment. Artifice was that which constricted 'sensation'. It demanded the 'artful or artist's humour', which meant an encroachment of the deliberate and self-conscious intellectual will on the necessary freedom of the poet's spontaneity. The creative genius, in this type of poetical character, called for surrender of the conscious self as the condition of its own operation. It called for a delicate poise of the faculties, in which the conscious, intellectual, purposive element was definitely subordinated—to what?

There are many names for this. The religious mind naturally thinks of it as God, declaring Himself through his chosen instrument—a human soul from which, for the moment of inspiration, the impediment of the separated and separating Self has been removed. Blake, who early declared that 'the Poetic Genius is the true Man', finally called it the Divine Humanity. If we are averse to such religious descriptions, we may try to avoid them by calling the power to which the Shakespearian poet surrenders the Self, by the name of Life. But that does not take us very far; for the life of the Self is also Life. Discrimination between the life of the Self, and the truer, deeper, higher life that utters itself only when the Self is in abeyance, is absolutely essential to any faithful description of the Shakespearian 'poetical character'; and such a

discrimination cannot be made except in terms which have, at some point or other, a religious reference. The notion of the Self as an impediment to true being is fundamental and inescapable; and that notion is the essence of the religious conception of the spiritual life. 'Nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.'

That is the supreme type of the attitude to which the Shakespearian poet inevitably points and tends. By that eternal word we understand him and his significance. He is a witness to the reality of the Fatherhood of God, into whose hands he commends his spirit. The Shakespearian poet cannot do otherwise. It is no virtue on his part, as he experiences the motion. He obeys the compulsion of his own total being; if he disobeys it, the discord and dissension within his being become intolerable, and deathly. 'Life to him would be death to me.' In those words speaks the experience itself.

The essential quality of the Shakespearian type of poetic genius is the virtue known to Christian spirituality as Humility. One must not force the identity too far, or too rigidly. If we regard Christian humility as supremely manifest in the attitude of the Christian mind before the mysteries of the Christian faith, the clear perception of the kinship between the humility of the Shakespearian poet and the humility of the Christian will depend on what we regard as the central mystery of the Christian faith. But if, as I believe, the life, the teaching, the death, and the eternal life of Christ are that central mystery, and if the dogmas of the Christian faith are to be regarded, as I again believe, as deriving their meaning and truth from the central mystery, and comprehensible only in 'the momentous depth of speculation' which that central mystery awakens in the dormant soul; then the humility of the Shakespearian poet and the humility of the Christian are continuous with one another. The Negative Capability of the poet achieves its natural consummation in the humility of the Christian before the Cross.

It is at this level that the conflict between Milton and Shakespeare in Keats' soul reveals its full meaning. I should say that of all our great poets, Milton was the least naturally inclined to humility. That he at times achieved it was a noble victory; and we may be thankful that the *mens conscia recti* sustained him when his brief humility failed. Milton was a great man and a great poet. Nevertheless, in one who seems to have believed himself a Christian poet, and is still generally regarded as one, it is astonishing how little reality the person of Christ or the mystery of Christianity

possessed for him. It was no wonder that Keats believed that Milton's 'philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years'. It was the divinity of an amazingly gifted undergraduate, who has disposed of all difficulties long before he knows what a difficulty is. As I have said elsewhere, Milton's Protestant theology ends in a complete emancipation from Christianity itself. The harvest of that sowing is to be sought not in any form of Christianity but in the confidence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism.

Nor does Milton's poetry make adequate amends. There is, of course, a wealth of unconscious poetic richness in Milton: of which the most astonishing manifestation is the passionate unconscious sympathy with the rebellious energy of Satan, the most attractive the lovely pictures of the sensuous innocence of our first parents in Paradise, the subtlest and most pathetic the continual mingling of the riches of classical and romantic story with his barren and repugnant theodicy. In Milton the Renaissance struggles with the Reformation; but that which is deeper and richer than either is lost. Whether or not Shakespeare was a professing Christian, his poetry has, perhaps more powerfully than any other single influence in our subsequent history, constantly replenished the sources of the religious awareness; so, in a lesser measure, has Keats. In both these poets there is something essentially liturgical and sacramental. The things they contemplate, the words they use, reach out beyond themselves, and become the portals of a mystery. There is no such penumbra of mystery in Milton, and no sense of it in him. With him imagination is a faculty; with them it is a condition. In him there is rich ornament in plenty, but it is not consubstantial with the thought it clothes. And since, as Coleridge said and I believe, deep thinking and deep feeling are inseparable, I am inclined after all to withdraw my previous admission that Milton felt deeply.

Yet I admit that this is an unsatisfying conclusion. Milton is something, and something big. On the moral and spiritual side I find it easy enough to place him: he is, simply, a bad man of a very particular kind, who is a bad man because he is so sublimely certain of being a good one. That judgement at once condemns him, and allows him all his uniqueness and his power. But, when I consider him, simply, as a poet, I cannot compass the corresponding aesthetic judgement, though I feel that there must be one. Keats was groping after it when he said that *Paradise lost* was 'a beautiful and grand curiosity'; but that is a long way from the



judgement I am seeking—still quite in vain. I think, too, that other modern critics who, like me, participate in Keats' reaction to Milton, find peculiar difficulty in formulating their opinion save in terms that lay them open to defenders of Milton such as Mr. Tillyard. But these defences of Milton teach us nothing; they tell us nothing new. They are irrelevant to our dissatisfaction with Milton: which is that a poet so evidently great, in some valid sense of the word, should have so little intimate meaning for us. We cannot make him real. He does not, either in his great effects or his little ones, touch our depths. He demonstrates, but he never reveals. He describes beauty beautifully; but truth never becomes beauty at his touch.

## IX

### KEATS AND WORDSWORTH

'I AM convinced', wrote Keats to Haydon on 10th January 1818, 'that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age—The *Excursion*, your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste.' He repeated his judgement in a letter to his brothers. He had changed significantly in the year and more since he wrote his sonnet, *Great spirits now on earth are sojourning . . .* Not only had Hazlitt taken the place of Hunt in the trinity of contemporary genius (and I think he was to keep it to the end) but a more general and inclusive praise of Wordsworth seems to be concentrating, not indeed on *The Excursion* alone, but upon that element in Wordsworth's genius of which *The Excursion* is typical, and of which the first two books of *The Excursion* are perhaps the noblest expression which Wordsworth achieved. That this high estimate of *The Excursion* should have coincided with a new appreciation of Hazlitt's depth of taste is peculiarly interesting, because Hazlitt himself did not adequately appreciate *The Excursion*:

There are delightful passages in *The Excursion*, both of natural description and of inspired reflection (passages of the latter kind that in the sound of the thoughts and of the swelling language resemble heavenly symphonies, mournful *requiems* over the grave of human hopes); but we must add, in justice and in sincerity, that we think it impossible that this work should ever become popular, even in the same degree as the *Lyrical Ballads*. It affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one, and instead of unfolding a principle in various and striking lights, repeats the same conclusions till they become flat and insipid. Mr. Wordsworth's mind is obtuse, except as it is the organ and the receptacle of accumulated feelings; it is not analytic but synthetic; it is reflecting rather than theoretical. *The Excursion*, we believe, fell still-born from the press. There was something abortive, and clumsy, and ill-judged in the attempt. It was long and laboured. The personages, for the most part, were low, the fare rustic; the plan raised expectations which were not fulfilled; and the effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up. It was not even *toujours perdrix*!

The judgement is, no doubt, far juster than any that was pronounced by a contemporary critic. Coleridge alone *might* have done better. There is undoubtedly a contrast, amounting almost to anti-climax, between the magnificent passage from *The Recluse* which Wordsworth quotes in his preface, 'as a kind of *Prospectus* of the design of the whole Poem' (i.e. *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and the unwritten third part), and *The Excursion* itself. But the prospectus-passage is Wordsworth at the height of his purest inspiration, a great poet if one ever was; and it is impossible to imagine a poem sustained on such a level. Disappointment, of some kind, was inevitable in any poem that followed such a preface. Hazlitt seems hardly to have realized quite how superb that invocation was, with its deliberate outsoaring of Milton.

The second point to remark is that Hazlitt is criticizing *The Excursion* for not containing an explicit system of philosophy. It was on this matter that his mind clashed with Wordsworth's; on this point that Wordsworth was bewildering to Hazlitt. For Wordsworth, in his prose-preface, first declared that the poem arose out of 'a determination to compose a philosophical poem', and concluded by saying: 'It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system; it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself.' The evasion was unconscious and inevitable; but to Hazlitt's mind it must have seemed almost deliberate. In fact, Wordsworth's difficulty was intrinsic. What he was trying to do was partly to communicate a profound spiritual experience, partly to expound a religion based upon this experience; and this religion was in process of identifying itself with Christianity. Unfortunately, the specific Christian mysticism—the experience of the eternal Christ—was not original to Wordsworth's mysticism; so that the transition from his mysticism to Christianity generally appears either elusive or arbitrary. What Hazlitt understood by a philosophical system was very different from anything Wordsworth had to offer.

This failure of Hazlitt's mind to engage with Wordsworth's is notable in itself, for it led Hazlitt to a manifest under-estimate of Wordsworth's imaginative powers, and an undue and slightly contemptuous emphasis on that part of Wordsworth's poetry which was most influenced by Wordsworth's conscious poetic theory: namely, his versification of the sentiments of simple people in realistic language. Coleridge made the classical criticism of this

Wordsworthian dogma, and since the publication of the *Biographia Literaria* no one, except the late Andrew Bradley, has been tempted to explore the matter farther. But there is something more to be said, or suggested. Probably it was not Wordsworth's instinctive practice that was at fault—*Margaret*, *We are Seven*, and dozens of others are beautiful and altogether successful poems—but some of Wordsworth's practice after it had been made self-conscious by theory. I am inclined to believe that Coleridge should bear the chief responsibility for this contamination. The planning of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and the definite allotment to the two poets of two separate provinces of the imagination (which was, I suspect, mainly Coleridge's doing) was a chief cause of this theoretical rigidity. If that is so, as I believe, then Coleridge in tearing the theory to pieces in the *Biographia Literaria* was demolishing what was his own invention rather than Wordsworth's, and removing from Wordsworth's genius an incrustation which was largely deposited by himself.

If that is true, or partly true, it explains why Wordsworth was hurt rather than instructed by Coleridge's criticism. For long before Coleridge's criticism was written Wordsworth had found his own solution to the real problem: of which the character of the Wanderer himself in *The Excursion* was symbolic. The Wanderer was a simple pedlar, but a man of education and imagination—an improbable pedlar maybe, but an easily acceptable one; and certainly a character who enabled Wordsworth to achieve his complex purpose—to unfold in utterance the religion and the morality and the life-wisdom which, he was convinced, was stored in the hearts of simple folk who lived in the bonds of 'natural piety'. In the first book of *The Excursion* Wordsworth expresses what is in his mind, and explains how the character of the Wanderer was a solution of the problem of expression which had been set him by his own matured conviction concerning the nature of true wisdom.

Oh! many are the Poets that are sown  
By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts,  
The vision and the faculty divine;  
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,  
(Which, in the docile season of their youth,  
It was denied them to acquire, through lack  
Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,  
Or haply by a temper too severe,  
Or a nice backwardness afraid of shame)

Nor having e'er, as life advanced, been led  
 By circumstance to take unto the height  
 The measure of themselves, these favoured Beings  
 All but a scattered few, live out their time,  
 Husbanding that which they possess within,  
 And go to the grave, unthought of. Strongest minds  
 Are often those of whom the noisy world  
 Hears least; else surely this Man had not left  
 His graces unrevealed and unproclaimed.

There is, moreover, an affinity between Wordsworth's thought in these lines and that of the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion*.

For Poesy alone can tell her dreams—  
 With the fine spell of words alone can save  
 Imagination from the sable chain  
 And dumb enchantment—Who alive can say,  
 'Thou art no poet—may'st not tell thy dreams'?  
 Since every man whose soul is not a clod  
 Hath visions and would speak, if he had lov'd,  
 And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.

Precisely that condition—'if he had lov'd'—is fulfilled by the Wanderer, though possibly the word carries a different nuance of meaning in Wordsworth and in Keats. But in the essential I believe Wordsworth and Keats were at one concerning the nature of the love which is the source of 'the vision and the faculty divine', whether it finds utterance in poetry or not. For both of them the essential character of this love was that it was 'self-destroying'. The Wanderer is portrayed as one prepared in boyhood

By his intense conceptions, to receive  
 Deeply the lesson deep of love which he,  
 Whom Nature, *by whatever means*, has taught  
 To feel intensely, cannot but receive.

And to the Wanderer in youth Wordsworth gives perhaps the most exquisite, and most magnificent, of all his descriptions of his own mystical beatitude in Nature.

He looked—  
 Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth  
 And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay  
 Beneath him:—Far and wide the clouds were touched,

And in their silent faces could he read  
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,  
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
 The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,  
 All melted into him; they swallowed up  
 His animal being; in them did he live,  
 And by them did he live; they were his life.  
 In such access of mind, in such high hour  
 Of visitation from the living God,  
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.  
 No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;  
 Rapt into still communion that transcends  
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise.  
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
 That made him; it was blessedness and love!

'And in *their silent faces* could he read Unutterable love.' The expression comes again in Book II, applied to the Wanderer himself.

And in *the silence of his face* I read  
 His overflowing spirit.

His spirit was overflowing with love of God's creation. 'He loved them all.' I believe it was due to something more than unconscious memory that Keats used the phrase at the critical moment of Apollo's dying into life in Book III of *Hyperion*:

Mute thou remainest—Mute! yet I can read  
*A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:*  
 Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.  
 Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,  
 Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,  
 Creations and destroyings, all at once  
 Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,  
 And deify me, as if some blithe wine  
 Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,  
 And so become immortal.

I do not imply that the experience is identical in Wordsworth and Keats; but I think it has the same spiritual import, involves the same depths of being, and is reached by the same means, namely love, experienced with a self-destroying intensity. The difference is rather in the province of reality from which the imaginative intensity derives. In Wordsworth it is primarily and

pre-eminently the world of physical nature, including the folk whose lives are shaped by natural piety; in Keats it is the world of history, of human destinies, including his own.

The relation between Wordsworth and Keats is peculiarly intimate; and probably impossible to unravel. Even after his hero-worship of Wordsworth had received a shock in personal encounter, when the Wordsworth family came to town in the winter of 1817-18, Keats still could not help regarding Wordsworth as the great living hero of poetry—the one contemporary poet who had faithfully explored the mystery of life. He reacted momentarily against the dogmatic simplicities of Wordsworth's verse; he told Reynolds that they were not 'to be rattle-snaked' into 'tender and true'; they were not 'for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages . . . to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist': nevertheless he is constrained to admit 'Wordsworth's grandeur'. This was on 3rd February 1818. A fortnight later, on 21st February, he tells his brothers that he is sorry 'that Wordsworth has left a bad impression where-ever he visited in town by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry. Yet he is a great poet if not a philosopher.' The wound made by Wordsworth's condescension to his Hymn to Pan as 'a pretty piece of Paganism' was evidently healing. No doubt it had smarted particularly, since *Endymion* was just on the point of publication. By 14th March, when he 'can't help thinking' Wordsworth 'has returned to his Shell—with his beautiful Wife and his enchanting Sister'—he can make a joke of it all; and a very good one.

It is hardly possible to sort out the different strains in Keats' momentary disillusion with Wordsworth. We may be certain that he had looked forward to meeting Wordsworth very ardently, because Wordsworth meant more to him than any living poet; moreover, during the weeks he spent at Oxford with Bailey in the previous September, Wordsworth had been their constant reading. Within six weeks, 14th September to 22nd November 1817, there are no less than three quotations from the *Immortal Ode* in Keats' letters—all different, and all appropriate to and illuminative of Keats' deepest feelings. Yet he was not lost in uncritical admiration. His defence of Wordsworth's *Gipsies* against Hazlitt's criticism, is itself a fine criticism of the poem:

Wordsworth had not been idle he had not been without his task—nor had they Gipseys—they in the visible world had been as picturesque an object as he in the invisible. The Smoke of

their fire—their attitudes—their Voices were all in harmony with the Evenings—It is a bold thing to say and I would not say it in print—but it seems to me that if Wordsworth had thought a little deeper at that Moment he would not have written the Poem at all—I should judge it to have been written in one of the most comfortable Moods of his Life—it is a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape—not a search after Truth—nor is it fair to attack him on such a subject—for it is with the Critic as with the poet had Hazlitt thought a little deeper and been in a good temper he would never have spied an imaginary fault there.

In temper and penetration it is perfect. Keats is applying to one of Wordsworth's later poems the criterion of the understanding uttered in an earlier one, which was a favourite with Keats, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*. 'But deem not this Man useless', cries Wordsworth.

'Tis Nature's law

That none, the meanest of created things,  
Of forms created the most vile and brute,  
The dumbest or most noxious, should exist  
Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,  
A life and soul, to every mode of being  
Inseparably linked.

That was written in 1797, and *Gipsies* was written ten years later: when Wordsworth's morality was beginning to get the upper hand of his imagination. But the simple fact that Wordsworth's phrase 'a spirit and pulse of good' is one of the clues to Keats' beautiful letter to Reynolds on 'diligent indolence', on 19th February 1818, when he was superficially most annoyed with Wordsworth; and that another phrase—'we have all of us one human heart'—from the same poem, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, is likewise a key to the lovely passage of his letter of March 1819 ('The creature hath a purpose and his eyes are bright with it') indicates how deeply Wordsworth had entered into Keats' being. In part Keats had, as Goethe said of himself in relation to Spinoza, 'discovered himself' in Wordsworth.

This deep response of Keats to Wordsworth—so intimate that he can use the essential Wordsworth as a touchstone for the moody one—made Keats' meeting with Wordsworth a tremendous event for him. And it must have been no small shock when, on the occasion of his first call, he was kept waiting a long while, only to be hurriedly greeted by a Wordsworth all dressed up for the real



event of the day—dinner with Mr. Kingston, one of the Commissioners of Stamp Duties. Wordsworth, of course, had his family to provide for, it was imperative that a mere Collector should be on good terms with a Commissioner; and one would imagine that Wordsworth ran a considerable risk of offending Mr. Kingston at Haydon's party: when Charles Lamb, tipsy and irrepressible, took a candle across the room for the purpose of examining the gentleman's 'organ'. Keats was of an age when young genius finds it difficult to make allowances for old. Mr. Kingston in particular seems to have stuck in Keats' gizzard. He wrote to Haydon on 8th April 1818:

I am affraid Wordsworth went rather huff'd out of Town—I am sorry for it. he cannot expect his fireside Divan to be infallible he cannot expect but that every Man of worth is as proud as himself. O that he had not fit with a Warrener that is din'd at Kingston's.

But Keats' admiration recovered from the set-back; and Wordsworth became the subject of his conscious meditation, in the letter to Reynolds of 3rd May 1818, from which we can see more clearly the unique position held by Wordsworth in Keats' hierarchy. The question with which he begins is the desirability of knowledge for 'widening speculation'—that is, according to Keats' fairly constant usage of the word, extending the scope of the contemplative imagination—and 'easing "the burden of the mystery"'. With this burden he has been struggling, and in grappling with it he has been led to consider Wordsworth's genius, and how he differs from Milton. Uppermost in Keats' mind at the moment appear to have been the prefatory lines from *The Recluse*, with their implicit but friendly challenge to Milton. Milton is the standard of reference, in Keats' inquiry, as gold is 'the meridian line of worldly wealth'.

And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Miltons apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth: And whether Wordsworth has in truth epic passion, and martyrs  
✓ himself to the human heart, the main region of his song.

The reference is to Wordsworth's claim, in the preface to *The Recluse*, that he is essaying a more arduous flight than Milton. 'Urania, I shall need Thy guidance, or a greater Muse . . . '.

For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink  
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds  
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.  
All strength—all terror, single or in bands,  
That ever was put forth in personal form—  
Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir  
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—  
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not  
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,  
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out  
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe  
As fall upon us often when we look  
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—  
My haunt, and the main region of my song.

The comparison between Milton's task and Wordsworth's is almost explicit; and the implication that Wordsworth's is the greater and more daring evident enough. So that Keats' question partly misses the mark. Wordsworth is not claiming that he has 'epic passion' and that he martyrs this to the human heart; but that his poem is to be more than the equivalent of Milton's epic, and is (so to speak) the veritable epic of the human soul. From this point of view it is worth consideration whether, in fact, Keats, when he attempted his epic, did not find himself inevitably caught between the Miltonic objectivity and the Wordsworthian subjectivity.

In the main, Keats admits Wordsworth's claim. Milton's 'philosophy' is in Keats' firm but modest judgement not adult; 'it may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years'. But Wordsworth's philosophy—if it is to be called a philosophy, seeing that 'Wordsworth is a great poet, if not a philosopher'—is beyond Keats' entire comprehension. He thinks he can understand and follow Wordsworth up to *Tintern Abbey*; and his idea is that Wordsworth, when he wrote that poem, was more or less in the position in which Keats is now, when the Chamber of Maiden Thought is gradually darkened, by consciousness of the mystery of pain and evil, but at the same time 'many doors are set open—all leading to dark passages'.

It seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them—he is a Genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries, and shed a light in them

—Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton—though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind.

Still, Milton 'did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done—Yet Milton was a Philosopher, had sure as great powers as Wordsworth'.

Behind Keats' difficulty is the fact that his problem is not one of philosophy, but of religion. Wordsworth is searching for a religious solution *de novo*, seeking it in the experience of the 'intensely feeling' natural man; whereas Milton is content with the solution offered by his peculiar version of Calvinist theology. How he came to be content with this is a question which can finally be answered only as Keats answered it: 'It proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human Knowledge or Religion.' The complete freedom of the human Reason which Milton asserted under cover of his sterile theology was the means by which such minds as Wordsworth's and Keats' had been emancipated for their re-exploration of human experience, and their rediscovery of the truth of religion—that is, of the necessity and inevitability of the religious mode of apprehension.

In *The Excursion*, which Keats set at the head of Wordsworth's poetry, Wordsworth did explore the dark passages which Keats hoped to explore; and in the lovely tale of *Margaret* set before the human imagination, without flinching but also without fever, the problem of human pain. And Wordsworth has his answer—at once profoundly religious and completely simple.

I stood, and leaning o'er the garden wall  
Reviewed that Woman's sufferings; *and it seemed*  
*To comfort me while with a brother's love*  
*I blessed her in the impotence of grief.*

Thus 'the burden of the mystery' is not merely lightened, but changed in the experience of the imaginative man who, like the Wanderer, 'could afford to suffer With those whom he saw suffer'. An astonishing depth of experience lies beneath that bare and simple sentence of Wordsworth's—an experience which seems impossible to put in other words than his own. Says the Wanderer:

But we have known that there is often found  
In mournful thoughts, *and always might be found*,  
A power to virtue friendly; were't not so,  
I am a dreamer among men, indeed  
An idle dreamer!

I suspect that Keats' desperate question in *The Fall of Hyperion*, concerning the poet and the dreamer, had behind it ineradicable, almost organic, memories of *The Excursion*, and of Wordsworth's solution to the mystery: which is, that pain, experienced to the depths of an 'intensely feeling' nature, mysteriously creates its own consolation. As it is for the imaginative man who, by the depth of his own experience, 'can afford to suffer With those whom he sees suffer', so with the directly suffering soul itself.

'My Friend! enough to sorrow you have given,  
The purposes of wisdom ask no more:  
Nor more would she have craved as due to One  
Who, in her worst distress, had oftentimes felt  
The unbounded might of prayer; and learned, with soul  
Fixed on the Cross, that consolation springs,  
From sources deeper far than deepest pain  
For the meek Sufferer.'

There, too, in unforced language, is the natural and unforced transition between Wordsworth's rediscovered religion and Christianity. I think those are astray who represent that there was a gulf between Wordsworth's religion of Nature, and Christianity; it seems to me that the passing from the one to the other was unstrained. The Cross was, indeed, the symbol of that which was revealed to Wordsworth through his imaginative experience of Nature and the destinies of men. And surely it is true that it was the Cross, and its power to temper and change and regenerate the faculties of man in successive generations, which had made Wordsworth's 'natural' sensibility what it was. Where, it seems to me, Wordsworth failed himself and us was by his effort, when the power of sustained imagination had largely left him, to represent the actual process of his self-discovery as much more orthodox from the beginning than it had been.

However that may be, there can be no doubt, I think, that for Keats—in spite of a temporary reaction—Wordsworth was eminently gifted with Negative Capability. There was no irritable reaching after fact and reason in this teacher of a wise passiveness. It is Coleridge, not Wordsworth, who 'would let go by a fine

isolated versimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery from being capable of remaining content with half-knowledge'. Even Keats' conclusion that 'This, pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no farther than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes all consideration', has its parallel in Wordsworth's words in the Preface to *The Recluse*:

Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,  
 Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms  
 Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed  
 From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;  
 Pitches her tents before me as I move,  
 An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves  
 Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old  
 Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be  
 A history only of departed things,  
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?  
 For the discerning intellect of Man,  
 When wedded to this goodly universe  
 In love and holy passion, shall find these  
 A simple produce of the common day.

But there we are made conscious no less of the distinction than of the affinity between Wordsworth's genius and Keats'. Wordsworth is in pursuit, not of all beauty, but of a particular beauty—the beauty of the real world. It is not that he martyrs his epic passion to the human heart; but that he is a genius with a mission and a message. God, in him, had rediscovered God in the universe; an eternal harmony between the mind of man and the world, whereby the world of experience was transfigured in the awakened soul. He would tell how the prophet-poet came to be what he was, as a necessary phase of the unfolding of the omnipresent beauty of the whole, discerned by him when his own unfolding was fulfilled. He would tell of the falling-in-love of the discerning intellect with the universe, as a necessary prelude to 'the spousal verse of the great consummation' of the marriage:

with the thing  
 Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man  
 Contemplating; and who, and what he was—  
 The transitory Being that beheld  
 This Vision.

That, from first to last, Wordsworth was—the man who had

beheld a Vision. It was in vain that Hazlitt demanded his promised 'system'. System Wordsworth had none: save the history of his own experience culminating in the reality and truth of the self-surpassing Imagination, and the power of those in whom Imagination had been awakened to endure suffering and find consolation in the very experience of suffering itself. Wordsworth had no system; but he had a gospel.

In the light of these considerations, the previous suggestion that in *Hyperion* Keats was in fact caught between a desire for Miltonic objectivity and a compulsion towards Wordsworthian subjectivity, becomes more substantial. Keats was driven along the Wordsworthian path. He had to put to himself Wordsworth's questions; they were inescapable, not merely because of the events of his own life, but because he was a man of genius who began, like Wordsworth, with an 'intensely feeling' nature emancipated from religious assumption. One says 'emancipated', without hesitation, because the forms assumed by Protestantism in England by the end of the eighteenth century were such as could not conceivably command the allegiance of the sensitive and imaginative man. The Calvinist theology which supplied the structure to Milton's epic had lost its vitality for the imaginative mind, and Milton's own epic, as Blake profoundly saw, derived its most splendid vitality from the rebellion of the unconscious Milton against the fetters imposed upon him by his conscious theology. If Milton's work were to be emulated, it could be emulated only as Wordsworth had emulated it, by attempting to create an epic of the rediscovery of vital religion in the experience of a prophetic man. Wordsworth, indeed, never completed his great enterprise; but what was revealed of it to Keats in *The Excursion* aroused in him thoughts beyond the reach of his soul. When he himself attempted an epic, in *Hyperion*, he experienced, at first hand, the nature of the prophetic compulsion to which Wordsworth had had to submit.

It was no wonder that Keats, in whom these half-conscious urges were contending, should have turned towards the Shakespearean ideal as he understood it. On the technical side, it meant for him the concrete objectivity of the drama, which seemed to dispense him from the need of a declared 'philosophy'; on the experiencing side, it would enable him to be as it were merely passive and receptive towards experience. But this latter ideal was not so easy to realize. Life is act, as well as contemplation,

and Keats was compelled to make decisions: he had to decide to write for a living. In consequence, he collaborated with Brown on *Otho the Great*, he wrote a narrative poem, *Lamia*, and he decided to fag (if he could find the opening) as a journalist on the Liberal side. But by then, the beginning of the end was come; and we can only dream about the solution he might have found. The pinnacle of his actual poetical achievement is the *Hyperion*, in which the conflict between the Miltonic ideal and Wordsworthian necessity is apparent, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, in which there is a momentary and perfect fusion between the objective bent of his genius and his subjective experience, and the great *Odes*, wherein his total nature finds lyrical utterance. The *Lamia* is not on this high level; it is an attempt to find an honourable compromise between the necessities of his own nature, and the demands of the public. Indeed, the works on which he was engaged in the summer of 1819, when the plenary inspiration of the spring had ebbed, and he had had to choose 'between despair and energy', reveal the complexity of the life-problem with which he was struggling. *Otho the Great* was mere hackwork; *Lamia* was an attempt to find an actual public; the revision of *Hyperion* was largely a reaction against both these activities—an effort to create in conscious independence of any possible audience. It was 'the egotistical sublime' in a different sense from that in which Keats applied the phrase to Wordsworth, and it involved him in an intense inward struggle—a desperate questioning of his own purpose and significance, which, as I think and have already suggested, came to him with a Wordsworthian background.

The question of Moneta, in the rejected lines (ll. 188-210)—

Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?  
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it.—

arose, I believe, in the mind of a man saturated in the questionings of Wordsworth, above all in *The Excursion*. Unless the imaginative contemplation of the pain and evil of the world does engender in the mind 'a power to virtue friendly', cries the Wanderer in Book I; unless consolation verily does spring 'from sources deeper far than deepest pain',—then he is 'a dreamer, an idle dreamer'. In Book III, Poetry and Philosophy are pitted against one another. Says the narrator:

if smiles

Of scornful pity be the just reward  
 Of Poesy thus courteously employed  
 In framing models to improve the scheme  
 Of Man's existence, and recast the world,  
 Why should not grave Philosophy be styled,  
 Herself, a dreamer of a kindred stock,  
 A dreamer yet more spiritless and dull?  
 Yes, shall the fine immunities she boasts  
 Establish sounder titles of esteem  
 For her, who (all too timid and reserved  
 For onset, for resistance too inert,  
 Too weak for suffering, and for hope too tame) . . .

The underlying drift of the incessant waves of intense meditative reflection in *The Excursion* is that philosophy, unless it is religion, is vain; and that poetry at its own imaginative height is religion, or the handmaid of religion. The poet who is faithful to his experience becomes the instrument by which the verity of religion is revealed anew. After a moment of agonized hesitation (of which the rejected lines are the witness) Keats claimed for and in himself also the operation of 'a power to virtue friendly'.

It is only when Wordsworth's and Keats' poetry are equally familiar, and equally intimate, that we can appreciate the depth and subtlety of Wordsworth's influence on Keats, or understand how superficial and transient was his impatience with what he called at one moment Wordsworth's 'philosophy', at another his lack of it. That was at a time when Keats was enamoured of the idea of 'turning all his soul' to Philosophy, and of preparing himself, by learning Greek and Italian, 'to ask Hazlitt in about a year's time the best metaphysical road I can take'. The last powerfully suggests that Keats' casual verdict that Wordsworth was 'no philosopher' was derived from Hazlitt. Assuredly, at this time Keats understood by 'philosophy' he knew not what; but Hazlitt possessed it—a mysterious something that would 'ease the burden of the mystery': something very different from Wordsworth's 'philosophy' which 'was engendered in the whims of an Egotist'. In order to acquire this mysterious knowledge, Keats was (he told Taylor on 24th April 1818) preparing to forgo his promised tour in the North. 'There is but one way for me—the road lies through application, study and thought.'



He did not forgo his tour, and it took him straightway to Wordsworth's country. How saturated his being was with Wordsworth is shown by his pride in the fact (twice mentioned) that he 'discovered without a hint "that ancient woman seated on Helm Crag"'. That discovery, and his triumph in it, were possible only to one to whom even Wordsworth's minor poems had become a second nature. The moment Brown and he arrived at Bo'ness, Keats 'enquired of the waiter for Wordsworth'.

He said he knew him, and that he had been here a few days ago, canvassing for the Lowthers. What think you of that—Wordsworth versus Brougham!! Sad—sad—sad—and yet the family has been his friend always. What can we say? We are now about seven miles from Rydale, and expect to see him to-morrow. You shall hear all about our visit.

Unfortunately, Wordsworth was not at home and Keats had to be content with leaving a note and 'sticking it up over what I knew must be Miss Wordsworth's portrait'. He confessed his great disappointment. But I suspect that Wordsworth's spirit was at work in Keats, when he meditated over the waterfall he had seen before breakfast.

What astonishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into etherial existence for the relish of one's fellows. I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely—I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest.

Part of the language and part of the thought come, I think, from the Preface to *The Recluse*:

Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,  
 Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms  
 Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed  
 From earth's materials—waits upon my steps.

And, though it may be supersubtle, I sense a connexion between this unconscious identification with Wordsworth, and his disagreement with Hazlitt. Though it is interesting to note, as a glimpse of Keats' way of 'feeling his own life'—to use Maine de Biran's phrase—that Keats really misunderstands Hazlitt, in a peculiar way. When Hazlitt said that the mountain-scenery of the Lakes made one appear small, it certainly never occurred to him to think what might be its effect on one who was more or less continually conscious of his own diminutive stature. Hazlitt, we may be sure, would have stared in surprise had Keats answered him, *viva voce*: 'No, I never forgot so completely that I was five foot and half an inch.' To be taken out of himself, for Keats, was to *forget* that 'he felt small'; for Hazlitt, most likely, it was to be made 'to feel small'.

We have already seen, in the case of Hazlitt's criticism of the *Gipsies*, with what fine intuition Keats, when his judgement was undisturbed, steered between uncritical admiration of Wordsworth and accepting Hazlitt's view of him, even though he revered Hazlitt's 'depth of taste' almost as much as *The Excursion*. But perhaps he would have accepted this part of Hazlitt's description of Wordsworth.

Milton is his great idol, and he sometimes dares to compare himself with him. His Sonnets, indeed, have something of the same high-raised tone and prophetic spirit. . . . We do not think our author has any very cordial sympathy with Shakespeare. How should he? Shakespeare was the least of an egotist of anybody in the world.

There is indubitably an affinity between Wordsworth and Milton, and Wordsworth was conscious of it; and just as Wordsworth felt more sympathy with Milton than with Shakespeare, so Keats felt more sympathy with Shakespeare than with Milton. But Keats' feelings towards Milton and Wordsworth were very different. Milton was remote, Wordsworth was near: and this not merely in point of time. Wordsworth, we may fairly say, was almost as intimate to Keats' experience as Shakespeare himself. When Keats imitates Milton he is conscious of what he is doing; the echoes of Wordsworth are innumerable and unconscious. At least, I can hardly conceive that Keats realized that a vital germ of the thought of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* came from the ninth of Wordsworth's *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, on the sight of a picture painted by Sir George Beaumont:

Praised be the Art whose subtle power could stay  
 Yon cloud, and fix it in that glorious shape;  
 Nor would permit the thin smoke to escape,  
 Nor those bright sunbeams to forsake the day;  
 Which stopped that band of travellers on their way,  
 Ere they were lost within the shady wood;  
 And showed the Bark upon the glassy flood  
 For ever anchored in her sheltering bay.  
 Soul-soothing Art! whom Morning, Noontide, Even,  
 Do serve with all their changeful pageantry;  
 Thou, with ambition modest yet sublime,  
 Here, for the sight of mortal man, hast given  
 To one brief moment caught from fleeting time  
 The appropriate calm of blest eternity.

I am quite certain that he did not know, when he composed the *Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country*, that he was echoing the thought and the cadence of Wordsworth's *Star-Gazers*. Why, asks Wordsworth, watching an eager crowd in Leicester Square taking turns to gaze through a telescope, does each man go away slackly, 'as if dissatisfied'?

Or is it that, when human Souls a journey long have had  
 And are returned into themselves, they cannot but be sad?

Does, then, a deep and earnest thought the blissful mind employ  
 Of him who gazes, or has gazed? a grave and steady joy,  
 That doth reject all show of pride, admits no outward sign,  
 Because not of this noisy world, but silent and divine!

In Keats' poem Burns' birthplace takes the place of the remote moon, as the object of contemplation which draws the soul out of its bodily sheath.

At such a time the soul's a child, in childhood is the brain;  
 Forgotten is the worldly heart—alone, it beats in vain—  
 Ay, if a madman could have leave to pass a healthful day,  
 To tell his forehead's swoon and faint when first began decay,  
 He might make tremble many a man whose spirit had gone forth  
 To find a Bard's low cradle-place about the silent North!  
 Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the bourn of care,  
 Beyond the sweet and bitter world,—beyond it unaware!  
 Scanty the hour and few the steps, because a longer stay  
 Would bar return, and make a man forget his mortal way.

Keats' experience is the more intense and feverish; but thought and metre alike seem directly to derive from Wordsworth.

Such reminiscences, though surely worth collecting, belong rather to the surface of an influence of Wordsworth on Keats which, as I have come more deeply to appreciate Wordsworth's greatness, has appeared to me continually more subtle and more pervasive. In such a province of inquiry it is very difficult to be positive in one's judgements; difficult above all to distinguish between the inevitable fusion of two profound poetic influences in the critic's own soul and the direct influence of the one poet upon the other. And I am inclined to be thankful that when I wrote *Keats and Shakespeare*, I did not know Wordsworth so intimately as I have come to know him since. An acute consciousness of Wordsworth's influence on Keats would have disturbed the clear outline of my picture, to no great gain of essential truth. It is with criticism as it is with poetry, or art in general, according to Keats, that 'every passion in its sublime is creative of essential beauty'; or, as Blake put the same truth, 'everything possible to be *believed* is an image of truth'. The necessary condition of creative criticism is to behold, and to be lost to self in contemplation of, the beauty that is truth, the truth that is beauty, in the living whole we study. It may not, it cannot, be all the truth, all the beauty, of that which we seek to comprehend: indeed, to comprehend all the truth, all the beauty, of any manifestation, would be to comprehend all things, and God who is All and in All. Our finiteness is the condition of our awareness of the Infinite; our temporality affords the means to knowing the Eternal; our limitation gives us the opportunity and the courage to glimpse the unlimited. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread; were men not fools they would be silent in adoration, whereas their purpose is to praise God and magnify Him for ever.

Anyhow, I am glad I was not acutely conscious of Wordsworth's influence on Keats, fourteen years ago; it might have 'cramped my style'. As things are now, I am free to speculate. I can wonder, for example, whether the real seed of Keats' 'sensation' of *Hyperion* was not sown in him by the forty lines in *The Excursion*, Book IV, describing the religion of Greece, when the

lonely herdsman, stretched  
On the soft grass through half a summer's day,  
With music lulled his indolent repose:  
And, in some fit of weariness, if he,

When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear  
 A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds  
 Which his poor skill could make, his fancy fetched,  
 Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,  
 A beardless Youth, who touched a golden lute,  
 And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.

Far more, it seems to me, than in anything of Milton's, in these lines of Wordsworth's is the germ of the imaginative feeling of *Hyperion*. This is not the classicism of Milton at all, though to define the difference would need a volume; but I will say at a venture that Milton's classicism is still in the main a medieval classicism that sees through a glass darkly and not face to face. Wordsworth's classicism is that of an emancipated soul which has inherited the intellectual freedom to see things in a pagan clarity, at the very moment that it is laying anew the foundations of the Christian religion. Greek myth is an apparatus for Milton, for Wordsworth a vision.

Great God! I'd rather be  
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

That is the feeling-tone, the 'sensation' of the Greek world for Keats. I think it was Wordsworth who opened the gates of his senses to it. Nor am I surprised, though I am sorry, that Wordsworth should have been a little condescending about Keats' hymn to Pan as 'a pretty piece of Paganism', when I consider that in those forty lines of *The Excursion*, whence (I suspect) Keats derived his imaginative vision of Apollo, Wordsworth had at once given startling life to the Greek religious world, and set it in due proportion—even unto

Pan himself,  
 The simple shepherd's awe-inspiring God.

Again, I cannot help thinking that much of the depth of meaning which Keats associated with his phrase, 'the principle of beauty in all things', was derived from the opening lines of *The Excursion*, Book IX. These lines, I fancy, had sunk deep in Keats' heart, and quickened in the good soil there. And did not 'the moving waters at their priest-like task' thence receive their first motion?

To every form of being is assigned . . .  
An *active* Principle:—howe'er removed  
From sense and observation, it subsists  
In all things, in all natures; in the stars  
Of azure heaven, the unenduring clouds,  
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone  
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,  
The moving waters, and the invisible air.  
Whate'er exists hath properties that spread  
Beyond itself, communicating good,  
A simple blessing, or with evil mixed;  
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,  
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link  
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.  
This is the freedom of the universe;  
Unfolded still the more, more visible,  
The more we know; and yet is revered least,  
And least respected in the human Mind,  
Its most apparent home.

This is a noble statement of what I have elsewhere called the sacramental attitude to Nature. Of this attitude Wordsworth was the prophet-poet, *par excellence*; and he was compelled by circumstance to be its pre-eminent 'philosophic' exponent, as well as the poet who pre-eminently experienced it. I think that Keats, even more fully than Wordsworth himself, expressed this attitude in the natural richness of poetry. And I grope after the distinction between them by saying that Keats' poetry is at once sacramental and liturgical; it has the imaginative reverberation of a solemn chant: whereas Wordsworth's is more purely sacramental. There is an element of Protestant or Puritan self-assertive austerity in Wordsworth, an element of strength, which he shares with Milton; and I can understand the reaction of those who, sensitive to the absence of this element in them, find in Keats and in Shakespeare a kind of moral weakness. They are content to reveal and suggest; whereas Milton and Wordsworth are driven to exhort and demonstrate. But what appears to me as an opposition in Shakespeare and Milton has become hardly more than a differentiation in Keats and Wordsworth. In their relation to one another the catholic and protestant elements in the English genius are harmoniously reconciled. By the time Wordsworth wrote, a strain that is essentially alien to the religious and poetic temper—confidence in the

pure intelligence—had been separated out from the queer Miltonic amalgam of religion and rationalism into its own proper 'sphere of influence': the exact sciences. The years in which Milton's epic inspiration flagged were those of the beginnings of the Royal Society.

It was, I suppose, its being in unconscious travail of this autonomy of the exact sciences which exhausted the rationalistic Christianity of the eighteenth century. It cleared the way for the unique poetic reassertion of the validity and necessity of the religious awareness, which is the glory of English romanticism. We must beware of *fin de siècle* epigrams like that of the late T. E. Hulme: 'Romanticism is spilt religion.' Romanticism has played a far nobler role in the history of the English genius; its achievement was the rediscovery of religion itself, the creation of the most potent influence working towards the revivification of Christian dogma. What Anglican theology already owes to our great romantic poets is inestimable; and it has yet, I believe, to enter into the fullness of its inheritance—and be inspired by the theology of the Divine Humanity in William Blake.

But the separation of the rationalist element of religion into the exact sciences was, like every other great advance of the human mind, fraught with peril. The emancipation of the scientific mind, and the liberation of the power of the applied sciences to transform the world, was not compensated by the revivification of religion by the romantic poets. The gulf between men's religion and their actions imperceptibly grew wider and wider. Applied science turned men into masses, and made society unamenable to whatever efforts towards spiritual control might spring from revived religion. While the Victorians lustily fought the unmeaning battle of Religion and Science, in the abstract, the power placed in the hands of an irresponsible society by the applied sciences was liberated from all control whatever, whether scientific or religious. Of the new mechanical society, there was neither a scientific nor a religious consciousness. Either would have been enough, for the one was bound to generate the other. There was neither.

So the great religious and poetic inspiration of English Romanticism dwindled into nothingness, the ineffectiveness so deeply felt by Matthew Arnold. Religion and poetry alike were debilitated by the inward sense of their own irrelevance. The social process was beyond their control—beyond even their power to influence, because they did not see the nature of the terrible contradiction of the new society: that it had been created by the emancipation

of the individual, only to negate the reality of the individual. It was not easy to discern. Who, save an isolated madman of genius like Rousseau, could have believed that a material progress evidently due to the emancipation of the individual would not emancipate him more and more? Who, save an obscure visionary like William Blake, could have seen that the material salvation of society depended on the religious and Christian regeneration of the individual man?

Blake alone, I believe, of our great romantic prophet-poets, followed his insight to the bitter and glorious end. Wordsworth flagged: the problem of accommodating his insight to the social fact was too heavy for him. Regeneration he experienced; the burden of the mystery was lightened: but the inspiration departed. He was too great a man not to dwindle under a little destiny. For anything we know, Keats would have done the same. He died young. If Wordsworth had died at thirty-five, we should look upon him as a marvel indeed, and Keats would have been spared some travail of spirit: he would not have been baffled as he was, by the discrepancy between the inspired Wordsworth, in whom he largely lived and who lived in him, and the Wordsworth whom he knew in the flesh.



## APPENDIX

*Two reviews of Keats' 'Poems' (1817) by B. R. Haydon and George Felton Mathew.*

These two reviews, as well as the poem by Mathew 'To a Poetical Friend' were discovered by Miss Roberta Cornelius, an American student of Keats, and published by her in the *Publications of the Modern Language Society of America*, vol. xl, No. 1. To her alone belongs the honour of the discovery. The verses of Mathew were previously known to us only from a transcript in the Woodhouse Book in the J. P. Morgan Library. The reviews are reprinted here in order that they may be more readily accessible.

[From *The Champion*, March 9, 1817]

### LITERATURE

POEMS: BY JOHN KEATS, Price 6s. LONDON. OL-  
LIER, WELBECK-STREET. 1817.

Here is a little volume filled throughout with very graceful and genuine poetry. The author is a very young man, and one, as we augur from the present work, that is likely to make a great addition to those who would overthrow that artificial taste which French criticism has long planted amongst us. At a time when nothing is talked of but the power and the passion of Lord Byron, and the playful and elegant fancy of Moore, and the correctness of Rogers, and the sublimity and pathos of Campbell (these terms we should conceive are kept ready composed in the Edinburgh Review-shop) a young man starts suddenly before us, with a genius that is likely to eclipse them all. He comes fresh from nature,—and the originals of his images are to be found in her keeping. Young writers are in general in their early productions imitators of their favorite poet; like young birds that in their first songs, mock the notes of those warblers, they hear the most, and love the best: but this youthful poet appears to have tuned his voice in solitudes,—to have sung from the pure inspiration of nature. In the simple meadows he has proved that he can

‘———— See shapes of light, aerial lymning,  
And catch soft floating from a faint heard hymning.’

We find in his poetry the glorious effect of summer days and leafy spots on rich feelings, which are in themselves a summer. He relies directly and wholly on nature. He marries poesy to genuine simplicity. He makes her artless,—yet abstains carefully from giving her an uncomely homeliness:—that is, he shows one can be familiar with nature, yet perfectly strange to the habits of common life. Mr. Keats is fated, or ‘we have no judgment in an honest face;’ to look at natural objects with his mind, as Shakespeare and Chaucer did,—and not merely with his eye as nearly all modern poets do;—to clothe his poetry with a grand intellectual light,—and to lay his name in the lap of immortality. Our readers will think that we are speaking too highly of this young poet,—but luckily we have the power of making good the ground on which we prophesy so hardily. We shall extract largely from his volume:—It will be seen how familiar he is with all that is green, light, and beautiful in nature;—and with what an originality his mind dwells on all great or graceful objects. His imagination is very powerful,—and one thing we have observed with pleasure, that it never attempts to soar on undue occasions. The imagination, like the eagle on the rock, should keep its eye constantly on the sun,—and should never be started heavenward, unless something magnificent marred its solitude. Again, though Mr. Keats’ poetry is remarkably abstracted, it is never out of reach of the mind; there are one or two established writers of this day who think that mystery is the soul of poetry—that artlessness is a vice—and that nothing can be graceful that is not metaphysical;—and even young writers have sunk into this error, and endeavoured to puzzle the world with a confused sensibility. We must however hasten to the consideration of the little volume before us, and not fill up our columns with observations, which extracts will render unnecessary.

The first poem in the book seems to have originated in a ramble in some romantic spot, ‘with boughs pavillioned.’ The poet describes a delightful time, and a little world of trees,—and refreshing streams,—and hedges of filberts and wild briar, and clumps of woodbine

— taking the wind

Upon their summer thrones

and flowers opening in the early sunlight. He connects the love of poetry with these natural luxuries.

For what has made the sage or poet write,  
But the fair paradise of Nature’s light?

This leads him to speak of some of our olden tales; and here we must extract the passages describing those of Psyche, and Narcissus. The first is exquisitely written.

So felt he, who first told, how Psyche went  
On the smooth wind to realms of wonderment;  
What Psyche felt, and Love, when their full lips  
First touched; what amorous and fondling nips  
They gave each other's cheeks; with all their sighs,  
And how they kist each other's tremulous eyes;  
The silver lamp—the ravishment—the wonder—  
The darkness—loneliness—the fearful thunder;  
Their woes gone by, and both to heaven upflown,  
To bow for gratitude before Jove's throne.

The following passage is not less beautiful,

What first inspired a bard of old to sing  
Narcissus pining o'er the untainted spring?  
In some delicious ramble, he had found  
A little space, with boughs all woven round:  
And in the midst of all, a clearer pool  
Than e'er reflected in its pleasant cool,  
The blue sky, here and there serenely peeping  
Through tendril wreaths fantastically creeping.  
And on the bank a lonely flower he spied,  
A meek and forlorn flower, with nought of pride,  
Drooping its beauty o'er the watery clearness,  
To woo its own sad image into nearness:  
Deaf to light Zephyrus it would not move;  
But still would seem to droop, to pine, to love.  
So while the poet stood in this sweet spot,  
Some fainter gleamings o'er his fancy shot;  
Nor was it long ere he had told the tale  
Of young Narcissus, and sad Echo's Vale.

This Poem concludes with a brief but beautiful recital of the tale of Endymion,—to which indeed the whole poem seems to lean. The Address to the Moon is extremely fine.

— Or by the moon, lifting her silver rim  
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim  
Coming into the blue with all her light,  
O maker of sweet poets, dear delight  
Of this fair world, and all its gentle livers;

Spangler of clouds, halo of chrystal rivers;  
Mingler with leaves, and dew and tumbling streams,  
Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams,  
Lover of loneliness, and wandering,  
Of upcast eye, and tender pondering!  
Thee must I praise above all other glories  
That smile us on to tell delightful stories.

'The Specimen of an induction to a poem,' is exceedingly spirited,—as is the fragment of a Tale of Romance immediately following it; but we cannot stay to notice them particularly. These four lines from the latter piece are very sweet.

The side-long view of swelling leafiness,  
Which the glad setting sun in gold doth dress;  
Whence ever and anon the jay outsprings,  
And scales upon the beauty of its wings.

The three poems following, addressed to Ladies, and the one to Hope are very inferior to their companions;—but Mr. Keats informs us they were written at an earlier period than the rest. The imitation of Spenser is rich. The opening stanza is a fair specimen.

Now morning from her orient chamber came,  
And her first footstep touch'd a verdant hill;  
Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,  
Silv'ring the untainted gushes of its rill;  
Which, pure from mossy beds, did down distil,  
And after parting beds of simple flowers,  
By many streams a little lake did fill,  
Which round its marge reflected woven bowers,  
And, in its middle space a sky that never lours.

The two Epistles to his friends, and one to his brother are written with great ease and power. We shall extract two passages, both equally beautiful.

But might I now each passing moment give  
To the coy muse, with me she would not live,  
In this dark city, nor would condescend  
Mid contradictions her delights to lend.  
Should e'er the fine-ey'd maid to me be kind,  
Ah! surely it must be whene'er I find  
Some flowery spot, sequester'd, wild, romantic,  
That often must have seen a poet frantic;

Where oaks, that erst the Druid knew, are growing,  
And flowers, the glory of one day, are blowing;  
Where the dark-leav'd laburnum's drooping clusters  
Reflect athwart the stream their yellow lustres,  
And intertwined the Cassia's arms unite,  
With its own drooping buds, but very white.  
Where on one side are covert branches hung,  
'Mong which the nightingales have always sung  
In leafy quiet: where to pry aloof,  
Atween the pillars of the sylvan roof,  
Would be to find where violet beds were nestling,  
And where the bee with cowslip-bells was wrestling.  
There must be too a ruin dark, and gloomy,  
To say 'joy not too much in all that's bloomy'.

The next passage is from the opening of the poet's letter to a friend.

Oft have you seen a swan superbly frowning,  
And with proud breast his own white shadow crowning;  
He slants his neck beneath the waters bright,  
So silently, it seems a beam of light  
Come from the galaxy: anon he sports,—  
With outspread wings the Naiad Zephyr courts,  
Or ruffles all the surface of the lake  
In striving from the chrystal face to take  
Some diamond water drops, and them to treasure  
In milky nest, and sip them off at leisure.  
But not a moment can he there insure them,  
Nor to such downy rest can he allure them;  
For down they rush as though they would be free,  
And drop like hours into eternity.  
Just like that bird am I in loss of time,  
Whene'er I venture on the stream of rhyme;  
With shatter'd boat, oar snapt, and canvass rent,  
I slowly sail, scarce knowing my intent;  
Still scooping up the water with my fingers,  
In which a trembling diamond never lingers.

Except in a little confusion of metaphor towards the end, the above passage is exquisitely imagined and executed.

A few Sonnets follow these epistles, and, with the exception of

Milton's and Wordsworth's, we think them the most powerful ones in the whole range of English poetry. We extract the first in the collection, with the assurance that the rest are equally great.

## TO MY BROTHER GEORGE

Many the wonders I this day have seen;  
 The sun, when first he kist away the tears  
 That fill'd the eyes of morn;—the laurell'd peers,  
 Who from the feathery gold of evening lean;—  
 The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,  
 Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears,—  
 Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears  
 Must think on what will be, and what has been.  
 E'en now, dear George, while this for you I write,  
 Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping  
 So scantily, that it seems her bridal night,  
 And she her half discover'd revels keeping.  
 But what, without the social thought of thee,  
 Would be the wonders of the sky and sea?

We have been highly pleased with that Sonnet which speaks—

Of fair hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,  
 And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;—  
 Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,  
 And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.

But the last poem in the volume, to which we are now come, is the most powerful and the most perfect. It is entitled 'Sleep and Poetry'. The poet past a wakeful night at a brother poet's house, and has in this piece embodied the thoughts which passed over his mind. He gives his opinion of the Elizabethan age,—of the Pope's school,—and of the poetry of the present day. We scarcely know what to select,—we are so confused with beauties. In speaking of poetry, we find the following splendid passage:—

——— Also imaginings will hover  
 Round my fire side, and haply there discover  
 Vistas of solemn beauty, where I'd wander,  
 In happy silence, like the clear meander  
 Through its lone vales; where I found a spot  
 Of awfuller shade, or an enchanted grot,  
 Or a green hill o'er spread with chequer'd dress  
 Of flowers, and fearful from its loveliness,

Write on my tablets all that was permitted,  
 All that was for our human senses fitted.  
 Then the events of this wide world I'd seize  
 Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease,  
 Till at its shoulders it should proudly see  
 Wings to find out an immortality!

The following passage relating to the same, is even greater. It is the very magic of imagination.

————— For lo! I see afar,  
 O'er sailing the blue cragginess, a car,  
 And steeds with streamy manes—the charioteer  
 Looks out upon the winds with glorious fear:  
 And now the numerous tramlings quiver lightly  
 Along a huge cloud's ridge; and now with sprightly  
 Wheel downward come they into fresher skies,  
 Tipt round with silver from the sun's bright eyes.  
 Still downward with capacious whirl they glide;  
 And now I see them on a green hill's side,  
 In breezy rest among the nodding stalks,  
 The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks  
 To trees and mountains;——

We have not room to extract the passages on Pope and his followers, who

——With a puling force,  
 Sway'd them about upon a rocking horse,  
 And thought it Pegasus.

Nor can we give those on the modern poets. We shall conclude our extracts with the following perfect and beautiful lines on the busts and pictures which hung around the room in which he was resting.

Sappho's meek head was there half smiling down  
 At nothing; just as though the earnest frown  
 Of over thinking had that moment gone  
 From off her brow, and left her all alone.  
 Great Alfred's too, with anxious pitying eyes,  
 As if he always listen'd to the sighs  
 Of the goaded world; and Kosciusko's worn  
 With horrid suffrance—mightily forlorn.

Petrarch, outstepping from the shady green,  
Starts at the sight of Laura; nor can wean  
His eyes from her sweet face. Most happy they!  
For over them was seen a free display  
Of outspread wings, and from between them shone  
The face of Poesy: from off her throne  
She overlook'd things that I scarce could tell.

We conclude with earnestly recommending the work to all our readers. It is not without defects, which may be easily mentioned, and as easily rectified. The author, from his natural freedom of versification, at times passes to an absolute faultiness of measure:—This he should avoid. He should also abstain from the use of compound epithets as much as possible. He has a few faults which youth must have;—he is apt occasionally to make his descriptions overwrought,—but on the whole we never saw a book which had so little reason to plead youth as its excuse. The best poets of the day might not blush to own it.

We have had two Sonnets presented to us, which were written by Mr. Keats, and which are not printed in the present volume. We have great pleasure in giving them to the public,—as well on account of their own power and beauty, as of the grandeur of the subjects; on which we have ourselves so often made observations.

TO HAYDON, WITH A SONNET WRITTEN ON SEEING THE  
ELGIN MARBLES

Forgive me, Haydon, that I cannot speak  
Definitively on these mighty things,—  
Forgive me that I have not eagle's wings,—  
That what I want, I know not where to seek:  
And think that I would not be overmeek  
In rolling out up-follow'd thunderings,  
Even to the steep of Heliconian springs,  
Were I of ample strength for such a freak.  
Think too that all those numbers should be thine;  
Whose else? In this who touch thy vesture's hem?  
For where men stared at what was most divine,  
With browless idiotism—o'erweening phlegm;—  
Thou hadst beheld the Hesperian shine  
Of their star in the east, and gone to worship them.



## ON SEEING THE ELGIN MARBLES

My spirit is too weak—mortality  
 Weighs heavily on me, like unwilling sleep,—  
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep  
 Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die,  
 Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.  
 Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,  
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep  
 Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.  
 Such dim conceived glories of the brain,  
 Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;  
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,  
 That mingles Grecian grandeur, with the rude  
 Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—  
 A Sun—a shadow of a magnitude!

[From the *European Magazine*, May, 1817, pp. 434-437]

*Poems by John Keats*. Foolscap, 8vo. pp. 121.

There are few writers more frequent or more presumptuous in their intrusions on the public than, we know not what to call them, versifiers, rhymists, metre-ballad mongers, what you will but poets. The productions of some among them rise, like the smoke of an obscure cottage, clog the air with an obtrusive vapour, and then fade away into oblivion and nothingness. The compositions of others equally ephemeral, but possessing, perhaps, a few eccentric features of originality, come upon us with a flash and an explosion, rising into the air like a rocket, pouring forth its short-lived splendour and then falling, like Lucifer, *never to rise again*.

The attention of the public, indeed, has been so frequently arrested and abused by these exhalations of ignorance, perverted genius, and presumption, that 'poems' has become a dull feature upon a title page, and it would be well for the more worthy candidates for regard and honour, particularly at this physiognomical, or, rather craniological period, could the spirit of an author be reflected there with more expressive fidelity. A quotation from, and a wood-engraving of *Spencer*, therefore, on the title page of Mr. Keats's volume, is very judiciously and appropriately introduced as the poetical beauties of the volume we are about to review, remind us much of that elegant and romantic writer.

For the grand, elaborate, and abstracted music of nature our

author has a fine ear, and now and then catches a few notes from passages of that never-ending harmony which God made to retain in exaltation and purity the spirits of our first parents. In 'places of Nestling-green for poets made,' we have this gentle address to Cynthia:

O maker of sweet poets! dear delight  
Of this fair world, and all its gentle livers;  
Spangler of clouds, halo of crystal rivers,  
Mingler with leaves, and dew, and tumbling streams,  
Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams,  
Lover of loneliness and wandering,  
Of upcast eyes and tender pondering!  
Thee, must I praise, above all other glories  
That smilest us on to tell delightful stories.

And also in his last poem, concerning sleep, the following interrogations and apostrophes are very pleasing:

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?  
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer  
That stays one moment in an open flower,  
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?  
What is more tranquil than a musk rose, blowing  
In a green island, far from all men's knowing?  
More healthful than the leafiness of dales?  
More secret than a nest of nightingales?  
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?  
More full of visions than a high romance?  
What but thee, sleep?

The volume before us indeed is full of imaginations and descriptions equally delicate and elegant with these; but, although we have looked into it with pleasure, and strongly recommend it to the perusal of all lovers of real poetry, we cannot, as another critic has injudiciously attempted, roll the name of Byron, Moore, Campbell and Rogers, into the milky way of literature, because Keats is pouring forth his splendors in the Orient. We do not imagine that the fame of one poet, depends upon the fall of another, or that our morning and our evening stars necessarily eclipse the constellations of the meridian.

Too much praise is more injurious than censure, and forms that magnifying lens, through which, the faults and deformities of its object are augmented and enlarged; while true merit looks more lovely beaming through the clouds of prejudice and envy, because

it adds to admiration and esteem the association of superior feelings.

We cannot then advance for our author equal claim to public notice for maturity of thought, propriety of feeling, or felicity of style. But while we blame the slovenly independence of his versification, we must allow that thought, sentiment, and feeling, particularly in the active use and poetical display of them, belong more to the maturity of summer fruits than to the infancy of vernal blossoms; to that knowledge of the human mind and heart which is acquired only by observation and experience, than to the early age, or fervid imagination of our promising author. But if the gay colours and the sweet fragrance of bursting blossoms be the promise of future treasures, then may we prophesy boldly of the future eminence of our young poet, for we have no where found them so early or so beautifully displayed as in the pages of the volume before us.

The youthful architect may be discovered in the petty arguments of his principal pieces. These poetical structures may be compared to no gorgeous palaces, no solemn temples; and in his enmity to the French school, and to the Augustan age of England, he seems to have a principle, that plan and arrangement are prejudicial to natural poetry.

The principal conception of his first poem is the same as that of a contemporary author, Mr. Wordsworth, and presumes that the most ancient poets, who are the inventors of the Heathen Mythology, imagined those fables chiefly by the personification of many appearances in nature; just as the astronomers of Egypt gave name and figure to many of our constellations, and as the late Dr. Darwin ingeniously illustrated the science of Botany in a poem called 'the Loves of the Plants.'

After having painted a few 'places of nestling green, for poets

What first inspired a bard of old to sing  
Narcissus pining o'er the untainted spring?  
In some delicious ramble he had found  
A little space, with boughs all woven round,  
And in the midst of all a clearer pool  
Than were reflected in its pleasant cool,  
The blue sky here, and there, serenely peeping  
Thro' tendril wreaths fantastically creeping.  
And on a bank a lonely flower he spied,

A meek and forlorn flower, with nought of pride,  
 Drooping its beauty o'er the watery clearness  
 To woo its own sad image into nearness;  
 Deaf to light Zephyrus, it would not move;  
 But still would seem to droop, to pine, to love;—  
 So while the poet stood in this sweet spot,  
 Some fainter gleamings o'er his fancy shot;  
 Nor was it long ere he had told the tale  
 Of young Narcissus and sad Echo's bale!

In the fragment of a Tale of Romance, young Calidore is amusing himself in a little boat in the park, till, hearing the trumpet of the warder, which announces the arrival of his friends at the castle, he hastens home to meet them: in after times we presume he is to become the hero of some marvellous achievements, devoting himself, like Quixote, to the service of the ladies, redressing wrongs, dispelling the machinations of evil genii, encountering dragons, traversing regions aerial, terrestrial, and infernal, setting a price upon the heads of all giants, and forwarding them, trunkless, like 'a cargo of famed cestrian cheese,' as a dutiful tribute to the unrivalled beauty of his fair Dulcinea del Toboso. This fragment is as pretty and as innocent as childishness can make it, save that it savours too much,—as indeed do almost all these poems,—of the foppery and affectation of Leigh Hunt!

We shall pass over to the last of some minor pieces printed in the middle of the book, of superior versification, indeed, but of which, therefore, he seems to be partly ashamed, from a declaration that they were written earlier than the rest. These lines are spirited and powerful:

Ah! who can e'er forget so fair a being?  
 Who can forget her half retiring sweets?  
 God! she is like a milk-white lamb that bleats  
 For man's protection. Surely the All-seeing,  
 Who joys to see us with his gifts agreeing,  
 Will never give him pinions, who intreats  
 Such innocence to ruin; who vilely cheats  
 A dove-like bosom. . . .!

There are some good sonnets; that on first looking into Chapman's Homer, although absurd in its application, is a fair specimen:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
 Round many western islands have I been,

Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold:  
 Oft of one wide expanse have I been told,  
 That deep brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene,  
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.  
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
 When a new planet swims into his ken;  
 Or like stout Cortez when, with eagle eyes,  
 He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
 Looked at each other with a wild surmise,  
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

‘Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold’ however is a bad line—not only as it breaks the metaphor—but as it blows out the whole sonnet into an unseemly hyperbole. Consistent with this sonnet is a passage in his ‘Sleep and Poetry.’

A schism

Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,  
 Made great Apollo blush for this his land,  
 Men were thought wise who could not understand  
 His glories: with a puling infant's force  
 They swayed about upon a rocking-horse,  
 And thought it Pegasus. Ah! dismal soul'd!  
 The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd  
 Its gathering waves,—ye felt it not. The blue  
 Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew  
 Of summer nights collected still to make  
 The morning precious: beauty was awake!  
 Why were ye not awake? but ye were dead  
 To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed  
 To musty laws lined out with wretched rule  
 And compass vile: so that ye taught a school  
 Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,  
 Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,  
 Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:  
 A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask  
 Of poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!  
 That blasphemed the bright lyrist to his face,  
 And did not know it,—no! they went about,  
 Holding a poor, decrepid standard out,  
 Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large  
 The name of one Boilleau!

These lines are indeed satirical and poignant, but levelled at the author of *Eloise*, and of *Windsor Forest*; of the *Essays* and the *Satires*, they will form no sun, no centre of a system; but like the moon exploded from the South Sea, the mere satellite will revolve only around the head of its own author, and reflect upon him an unchanging face of ridicule and rebuke. Like Balaam's ass before the angel, offensive only to the power that goads it on.

We might transcribe the whole volume were we to point out every instance of the luxuriance of his imagination, and the puerility of his sentiments. With these distinguishing features, it cannot be but many passages will appear abstracted and obscure. Feeble and false thoughts are easily lost sight of in the redundancy of poetical decoration.

To conclude, if the principle is worth encountering, or the passage worth quoting, he says :

Let there nothing be  
More boist'rous than a lover's bended knee;  
Nought more ungentle than the placid look  
Of one who leans upon a closed book;  
Nought more untr tranquil than the grassy slopes  
Between two hills.—All hail delightful hopes!  
As she was wont, the imagination  
Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone,  
And they shall be accounted Poet Kings  
Who simply tell the most hearteasing things.  
O may these joys be ripe before I die.

Though he well adds :

Will not some say that I presumptuously  
Have spoken? that from hastening disgrace  
'Twere better far to hide my foolish face?

Let not Mr. Keats imagine that the sole end of poesy is attained by those

Who strive with the bright golden wing  
Of genius, to flap away each sting  
Thrown by the pitiless world.

But remember that there is a sublimer height to which the spirit of the muse may soar; and that her arm is able to uphold the adamant shield of virtue, and guard the soul from those insinuating sentiments, so fatally inculcated by many of the most

popular writers of the day, equally repugnant both to reason and religion, which, if they touch us with their poisoned points, will contaminate our purity, inoculate us with degeneracy and corruption, and overthrow among us the dominion of domestic peace and public liberty.

Religion and the love of virtue are not inconsistent with the character of a poet; they should shine like the moon upon his thoughts, direct the course of his enquiries, and illuminate his reflections upon mankind. We consider that the specimens here presented to our readers, will establish our opinion of Mr. Keats's poetical imagination; but the mere luxuries of imagination, more especially in the possession of the proud egotist of diseased feelings and perverted principles, may become the ruin of a people—inculcate the falsest and most dangerous ideas of the condition of humanity—and refine us into the degeneracy of butterflies that perish in the deceitful glories of a destructive taper. These observations might be considered impertinent, were they applied to one who had discovered any incapacity for loftier flights—to one who could not appreciate the energies of Milton or of Shakspeare—to one who could not soar to the heights of poesy,—and ultimately hope to bind his brows with the glorious sunbeams of immortality.

G. F. M.

## NOTES

I, p. 7.

I cannot resist quoting, in partial explanation of Mathew's attitude to Keats, a passage from Leigh Hunt's still too much neglected volume, *Imagination and Fancy* (2nd ed., p. 315). This volume contains some of the finest criticism of poetry written in the nineteenth century. The passage appropriately is taken from the essay on Keats himself: the reference is to the attack on Keats in *The Quarterly Review*.

But the secret at the bottom of such unprovoked censure is exasperated inferiority. Young poets, upon the whole—at least, very young poets—had better not publish at all. They are pretty sure to have faults; and jealousy and envy are as sure to find them out, and wreak upon them their own disappointments. The critic is often an unsuccessful author, almost always an inferior one to a man of genius, and possesses his sensibility neither to beauty nor to pain. If he does—if by any chance he is a man of genius himself (and such things have been), sure and certain will be his regret, some day, for having given pains which he might have turned into noble pleasures; and nothing will console him but that very charity towards himself, the grace of which can only be secured to us by our having denied it to no one.

I wonder whether in the last sentence of this beautiful passage, Hunt had in mind Byron's criticism of Keats.

I, p. 10.

Leigh Hunt, in his *Examiner* review of the 1817 volume, was even more severe towards them, when he said that the earlier poems might well have been omitted, 'especially the string of magistrate-interrogations about a shell and a copy of verses'. But since that review was not published till June 1817, it is doubtful whether Mathew could have seen it before writing his. Haydon's review of 9th March 1817 must have appeared immediately after, or even before, the book was published.

II, p. 17.

This is the original text of the sonnet as given by Charles Cowden Clarke in his *Recollections of a Writer*. In the final form line 7



became: 'Yet did I never breathe its pure serene'; and line 11, 'Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes'. Leigh Hunt, in his essay in *Imagination and Fancy*, seems to suggest that the 'eagle eyes' came from Titian's portrait of Cortez, when he says: 'His "eagle eyes" are from life, as may be seen by Titian's portrait of him.'

II, p. 18.

Leigh Hunt, in publishing the poem in *The Examiner*, December 1816, objected to the vagueness of the phrase.

II, p. 19.

This is precisely the criticism which Keats, in 1820, wished to impress upon John Clare, as may be seen by the extracts from two letters written to Clare by Taylor the publisher, published by Mr. Edmund Blunden in his little volume, *Shelley and Keats; as they struck their Contemporaries* (pp. 72 and 77). In the first letter (16th March 1820), Taylor wrote:

Keats came to dine with me the Day before yesterday for the first time since his illness—He was very sorry he did not see you—When I read Solitude to him he observed that the description too much prevailed over the sentiment.

Apparently, in this form, as given at second-hand, the criticism was obscure to Clare. Clare, who shared Taylor's great admiration for Keats, seems to have been anxious to have it made plain. And in the second letter (29th Sept. 1820) Taylor wrote to Clare:

If he [Keats] recovers his Strength he will write to you. I think he wishes to say to you that your Images from Nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular Sentiment. To meddle with this Subject is bad policy when I am in haste, but perhaps you conceive what it is he means: his Remark is only applicable now and then when he feels as if the description overlaid and stifled that which ought to be the prevailing Idea.

Put 'the particular Sentiment' and 'the prevailing Idea' together, blend them into one, and we have 'the predominant passion' of Coleridge. This cardinal point of poetical criticism, so clearly grasped by Coleridge and Keats, is but rarely recognized to-day.

Therefore we take the opportunity of quoting a passage from Leigh Hunt's criticism of *The Eve of St. Agnes* in *Imagination and Fancy* (p. 334) where this axiom of poetical criticism is equally recognized. Leigh Hunt is commenting on the last lines of stanza xv.

But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told  
His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook  
Tears, at the thought of these enchantments cold,  
*And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.*

The italics are Hunt's.

This passage [he says], 'asleep in lap of legends old', is in the highest imaginative taste, fusing together the imaginative and the spiritual, the remote and the near. Madeline is asleep in her bed; but she is also asleep in accordance with the legends of the season; and therefore the bed becomes *their* lap as well as sleep's. The poet does not critically think of all this; he feels it: and thus should other young poets draw upon the prominent points of their feelings on a subject, sucking the essence out of them in analogous words, instead of beating about the bush for *thoughts*, and perhaps getting clever ones, but not thoroughly pertinent, not wanted, not the best. Such, at least, is the difference between the truest poetry and the degrees beneath it.

## II, p. 30.

'Unconscious' is here used quite arbitrarily, to denote a less complete awareness than that of the final act of creation. The nature of this 'unconsciousness' is sufficiently defined in the course of the essay.

## III, p. 41.

Compare with this Moneta's address to the poet in *The Fall of Hyperion*, lines 168-70:

Thou art a dreaming thing,  
A fever of thyself; think of the earth;  
What bliss, even in hope, is there for thee?  
What haven? every creature hath its home,  
Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,  
Whether his labours be sublime or low—  
*The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct:*  
*Only the dreamer venoms all his days,*  
*Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.*

V, p. 72.

The name 'pseudo-statement', given by Mr. I. A. Richards to such a declaration as 'Beauty is Truth', is unfortunate. A 'pseudo-statement' sounds a very poor thing—a sham statement. But I find, on consulting Mr. Richards's admirable essay 'Science and Poetry', that this apparently contemptuous nuance in the word is unintentional. Mr. Richards's intention is more clearly given in the following passage from his essay:

A pseudo-statement is 'true' if it suits and serves some attitude or links together attitudes which on other grounds are desirable. This kind of truth is so opposed to scientific 'truth' that it is a pity to use so similar a word, but at present it is difficult to avoid the malpractice. . . . A pseudo-statement is a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organizing our impulses and attitudes (pp. 58-9).

It is clear from this that Mr. Richards's term 'pseudo-statement' is not derogatory in intention, however much it may be in effect. A little later in the same essay, Mr. Richards writes:

On the whole true statements are of more service to us than false ones. None the less we do not and, at present, cannot order our emotions and attitudes by true statements alone. Nor is there any probability that we ever shall contrive to do so. This is one of the great new dangers to which civilization is exposed. Countless pseudo-statements—about God, about the universe, about human nature, the relations of mind to mind, about the soul, its rank and destiny—pseudo-statements which are pivotal points in the organization of the mind, vital to its well-being, have suddenly become, for sincere, honest and informal minds, impossible to believe. For centuries they have been believed; now they are gone, irrecoverably; *and the knowledge which has killed them is not of a kind upon which an equally fine organization of the mind can be based* (p. 60).

Here a 'pseudo-statement' is equivalent to a 'false statement', an equivalence which is, surely, unwarrantable. For in that case we are involved in the necessity of organizing our emotions and attitudes by statements which we know to be false.

A poetic or metaphorical statement, because it is not 'true' in a certain limited sense of correspondence to 'fact', is not false. Take Shakespeare's 'Ripeness is all'. It is an assertion concerning the moral (or as I should say) the metabiological nature of man. Neither logic nor science has any means of checking it. If we

paraphrase it into 'Maturity is the most necessary achievement of man', most of the unique suggestion is lost; but even in that impoverished form, it is not false. It may perfectly well be true. The assertion that 'God is Love' may perfectly well bear, for one who does not believe in the existence of God, a profound meaning; to such a mind it is neither true nor false. It is an inevitably metaphorical expression of something which, for lack of a better phrase, we will provisionally call 'spiritual truth'. Take again this passage from a sermon of Meister Eckhart:

There is something in the soul wherein God simply is, and this is a nameless thing and has no proper name. It neither has nor is a definite entity, for it is not this nor that nor here nor there; what it is, it is from another, wherewith it is the same; the One streams into it, and it into the One. (Sermon XCIV.)

For most people this is pure nonsense; for a few it is full of meaning. It is, I should say, a true description of a rare and highly desirable condition of the human organism.

Here is the point. By what means are these and similar rare and desirable conditions of the human organism to be described? The conditions are real; they are not delusions. Modern psychology is, as yet, quite incompetent to furnish a description comparable in delicacy with that of Eckhart given above. Yet the description is wholly metaphorical. To say that 'it helps to organize our emotions and attitudes' may be true enough; but that gives us no help at all in our effort to understand such a statement. We must have actually experienced, in full or in part, a similar condition of the organism.

Very likely, as moderns, we no longer believe in the existence of the soul as a separate entity. But the innumerable poetic and religious statements in which the soul plays part, do not thereby lose their meaning. The conception of the soul was necessary to explicate and communicate certain common or rare conditions of the organism. It is by no means certain that it is not still necessary. The difference is that now, for many, the metaphor is become a conscious metaphor.

It is this attainment of a condition in which very many traditional metaphors have become wholly conscious which makes Mr. Richards's cleavage into 'pseudo-statements' and 'true statements' inadequate. We have actually reached a condition of awareness of which one essential characteristic is that we see immediately that such a cleavage does a certain violence to the facts. Statements

concerning the intimate nature of man are neither true nor false; they correspond to experience (not 'fact') or they do not.

But even that account is inadequate. For a condition of the organism is surely a fact. By saying that a certain condition of the human organism (commonly called 'spiritual' or 'moral') is a complex combination of emotions and attitudes, we do not abolish its status as a fact. The problem is to give accurate descriptions of these facts. Poetry alone seems able to do this.

We may distinguish two problems, though they are only two aspects of a single problem: the accurate description of objects, and the accurate description of experiences. When John Clare speaks of the primrose

With its crimp and curdled leaf  
And its little brimming eye,

this is surely an accurate description: but accurate with an accuracy unknown to and unachievable by science. When Catullus says:

Soles occidere et redire possunt  
Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux  
Nox est perpetua una dormienda,

he is accurately describing an experience. Quite possibly we may believe in the immortality of the soul—that makes no difference to the accuracy of Catullus' description of his experience.

All objects and all experiences are unique. When their uniqueness is adequately communicated, then, no matter what unverifiable subsidiary statements are incorporated into the language by which they are communicated, the total statement is in a very real and practical sense 'true'. To deny 'truth' to such total statements is a very arbitrary limitation of the word, 'truth'. I should say that Mr. Richards's name of 'pseudo-statements' could only be accepted as fairly applicable to subsidiary statements forming part of a total poetic statement, when these are wrenched from their context.

It is thus with the 'pseudo-statements' of religion. They have to be reinstated in the context of the total statement of which they are part. 'God is Love' is not nonsense, neither is it a magical talisman by which emotions and attitudes can be efficaciously organized; it is a detached phrase taken from a total statement about the nature of human experience. When we understand the statement in its totality, we have no difficulty in accepting it for true. All we have to realize is that other total statements about the nature of human experience, which include within them 'pseudo-state-

ments' utterly at variance with the 'pseudo-statements' of Christianity, are equally true. Naturally, Christianity cannot admit this; but that is no reason why enlightened minds should not.

'Pseudo-statements', therefore, appear to be necessary as a means of making a total statement that is true concerning human experience. Religions insist that their necessary 'pseudo-statements' are true; they are not true, they are merely necessary to one particular total statement. Religion (or rather every particular religion) errs by insisting on the truth of its necessary 'pseudo-statements'; its critics generally err no less by supposing that when they have denied its 'pseudo-statements' they have proved its total statement false. For myself, I suspect that no total statement of any kind about human experience, however seemingly 'scientific', can be made without 'pseudo-statements'.

This is hardly the appropriate place to develop the discussion, but it may be remarked in conclusion that the argument indicated here avoids the pessimistic conclusion to which Mr. Richards is driven, when speaking of the various religious and moral 'pseudo-statements' that are now 'gone irrevocably', he says:

The knowledge which has killed them is not of a kind upon which an equally fine organization of the mind can be based.

If my argument is, as I believe, correct, no 'pseudo-statement' which has been an integral part of a true total statement concerning human experience is ever gone 'irrevocably'. It has merely given place to other 'pseudo-statements'. But the modern mind (or that enlightened part of it represented so admirably by Mr. Richards himself) is now capable of recognizing its own 'pseudo-statements' at the very moment of formulating them: and this capacity, which is at present only faintly developed, will enable men to accept, consciously and provisionally, the 'pseudo-statements' of the past. The true total statements of which these 'pseudo-statements' were the temporary vehicles will thus remain perfectly valid. The fine organization of the mind, which Mr. Richards and all good men desire, will not be lost. It will merely be carried on into a slightly finer organization of mind—finer by this one new capacity, of receiving a true total statement without accepting the truth in isolation of the 'pseudo-statements' by which it was necessarily mediated.

V, p. 75.

Mr. Frederick Page has pointed out to me that Dr. Bridges may have had not the first, but the second stanza, of the

Ode in his mind. And, certainly, it would be possible to interpret the second stanza as an assertion of 'the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection'. But I am persuaded that the interpretation would be mistaken. It may seem meticulous to distinguish very strictly in such a matter; but the track of Keats' thought is both simple and tenuous, and the matter is of high importance. The supremacy which he asserts is the supremacy of the changeless, and in the strict metaphysical sense, eternal world of the Imagination. He is not asserting the supremacy of Art over Nature; but of the Imaginative vision of Nature over the immersion in Nature to which, in our total animal existence, we are 'condemned'.

Further, Mr. Page reminds me that there are two transcripts of the poem in which there are no inverted commas to the assertion 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'. But the evidence is that Keats corrected his 1820 volume with great care, and the presence of the inverted commas suggests to me that Keats thought the distinction between the utterance of the Urn and his own endorsement of it to be of some importance. The version of the poem which appeared in *Annals of the Fine Arts* (No. XV, Jan. 1820) prints the lines thus:

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.—That is all  
Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.

A form which, in the late Mr. Buxton Forman's opinion and my own less authoritative one, confirms the reading of the 1820 volume.

V, p. 78.

This passage from *Endymion*, to which my attention was drawn by Mr. Frederick Page, is deeply interesting. If the thought be carefully followed, it will be seen to contain the germ of one essential thought in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. There is a true regality beyond the earthly, says Keats. It cannot be reached

But by a patient wing, a constant spell,  
Or by ethereal things that, unconfin'd,  
Can make a ladder of the eternal wind  
And poize about in cloudy thunder-tents  
To watch the abysm-birth of elements.

The 'eternal wind' is obviously a metaphor; it is not an ascension into remoter regions of physical space that Keats is imagining, but from Time into Eternity, from Existence into Being—to a realm

'above the withering of old-lipp'd Fate'. In that realm unknown Powers keep religious state

And, silent as a consecrated urn,  
Hold sphery sessions for a season due.

Here 'the foster-child of silence', the 'silent form', definitely appears as the symbol of Eternity, and its 'Powers'.

For 'ethereal things' compare the passage from the Letters quoted on p. 64.

V, p. 79.

A habit of visual imagination in profile appears to have existed in Keats even as a schoolboy, for in his letter to Haydon (10th April 1818) he wrote: 'When a schoolboy the abstract idea I had of an heroic painting was what I cannot describe. I saw it *some-what sideways*, large, prominent, round and coloured with magnificence. . . .' Which suggests that the frieze of a Greek vase rather satisfied an existing habit of the visual imagination, than originated a new one.

One may perhaps relate with this three characteristic uses of the word *sidelong*:

Bertha was a maiden fair,  
Dwelling in th' old Minster-square,  
From her fire-side she could see,  
*Sidelong*, its rich antiquity.—(*The Eve of St. Mark*.)

I set her on my pacing steed  
And nothing else saw all day long  
For *sidelong* would she bend and sing  
A faery's song.—(*La Belle Dame*: 1st version.)

Nymph of the downward smile, and *sidelong* glance.  
(*To G.A.W.*)

Compare with this last the picture of Madeline in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, VII.

V, p. 80.

The impossibility of rendering in my clumsy prose the full suggestion of the fourth stanza is some measure of its perfection. The town the enchanted ones have left is sad and lonely at their



loss. There is a gap in Nature; not that thrilling one made by the air which, 'but for vacancy',

Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too.

This is the subtler emptiness which must needs descend upon Nature if, by an impossibility, the Eternity of Imagination were embodied and made sensuously apprehensible. Imagination (the Eye which beholds Eternity) is beyond the senses (of which the Mind is one) as its objects are beyond Existence: the sensuous—the perceived and the thought—can be only the symbol of the imagined.

Eternity is not a mode of Existence; if it were, it could exist only at the cost of other modes of Existence. The eternally existent would be merely a class of existing things, or beings, deriving its own pre-eminence from their degradation, and battenning its substance upon their emptiness. This is the tragedy of all specific religions. At this tragedy Keats glances, in the silent desolation of the little town, which has, so to speak, sacrificed its inhabitants to Heaven. But Keats knows that Eternity is not a mode of Existence, though it can only be represented in the guise of Existence. This is, if we will, the tragedy of Art. Therefore Keats says:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: *Cold Pastoral!*

V, p. 80.

Mr. Frederick Page has drawn my attention to the relation which exists between the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Fancy*. I am unable to accept his suggestion that the 'ingle' in which we are invited to sit in *Fancy* corresponds to the Cave of Quietude in *Endymion*, Book IV; for I do not believe that the 'ingle' has any symbolic intention. It is, surely, a concrete and mundane fireside, such as that by which he was sitting on the night of 2nd January 1819 when he copied the lines.

What do then?

Sit thee in an ingle when  
The sear faggot blazes bright,  
Spirit of a winter night;  
When the soundless earth is muffled  
And the caked snow is shuffled  
From the Ploughboy's heavy shoon:  
When the night doth meet the noon

In a dark conspiracy  
 To banish vesper from the sky.  
 Sit thee then and send abroad  
 With a mind self-overaw'd  
 Fancy high-commission'd.

But I agree with Mr. Page that what Keats here calls *Fancy*, is really much more akin to *Imagination*; and that the contrast between the fading pleasures of sense (in the widest meaning) and the eternal delights of the *Imagination* drawn by Keats in *Fancy* has a close relation to the thought of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. It is pitched, throughout, in a minor key; but the message is the same.

Break the Mesh  
 Of the Fancy's silken leash  
 Where she's tethered to the heart.

In other words, let not the *Imagination* be chained to our dreams of a mortal happiness. Set her free from the aching demands of our animal existence. ('Pleasure'—true Pleasure—'never is at home', i. e. in the sensual and animal man.) Self-detachment is necessary to real *Imagination*.

The same thought, it may be noted, occurs also in *Bards of Passion and of Mirth*, written at the same time and in the same form. (A proof, if any were needed, that the verses were not addressed to Beaumont and Fletcher.) It is on 'the double immortality of poets'. They are immortal in *Eternity*, symbolically imagined as a *Paradise*; they are immortal in *Time* also, where

The souls ye left behind you  
 Teach us here the way to find you  
 Where your other Souls are joying  
 Never slumber'd, never cloying.

'Cloying'—the epithet occurs in *Fancy* ('Not a mistress but doth cloy') and in *The Grecian Urn*.

All breathing human passion far above  
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd.

It is the sign of *Existence*; inseparable from 'the little week' which mortals must 'sojourn with their cares'. But the poets 'teach us here the way to find them', in *Eternity*; teach us 'what doth strengthen', which is detachment from, 'and what maim', which is identification with, animal existence, the desires of the heart.

The note has not yet the depth it attains in the Odes. More experience, of life and of poetry, was required. At the very moment he wrote these two 'rondeaus', Keats was consciously struggling for an ampler poetic form. The 'rondeaus' themselves were an experiment; and on 3rd May, when the *Ode to Psyche* had been written, he was still experimenting, witness the beautiful *If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd*, which begins to approximate closely to the magnificent Ode form, only half-achieved in *Psyche*, which was Keats' unique creation.

This simultaneous struggle for content and for form, for pure experience and pure utterance, is in itself a supreme victory of detachment. It is this which makes Keats a great poet, as well as a great man. The whole period, December 1818 to May 1819, is a conquest of detachment; and the detachment of the man is secured and consolidated by those so-called 'technical' advances by which he brings his new knowledge to utterance. Utterance is itself detachment. Therefore the *great* poet is the perfect type of man; therefore also there has been no truly wise man who has not been, in some radical sense, a poet—a master of utterance.



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